



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF JOHN PAUL II
TO H.E. MR MOHAMED SALIA SOKONA
AMBASSADOR OF MALI***

Thursday, 27 May 2004

Mr Ambassador, I welcome Your Excellency with joy as you present the Letters accrediting you as Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of the Republic of Mali to the Holy See. I thank you for your kind words conveying to me the respectful tribute of the President of the Republic and of the People of Mali. I would be grateful if you would reciprocate by conveying my courteous good wishes to H.E. Mr Amadou Toumani Touré, Head of State, for himself and for the accomplishment of his office at the service of all the inhabitants of the Country. My thoughts also go to the Leaders of the Nation and to all who live in it. You stress, Mr Ambassador, the firm determination of the Authorities of your Nation to work actively to establish more peaceful and fraternal relations between human beings, not only within your own boundaries but also in the sub-region to which you belong and across the African Continent. This is a noble undertaking that honours your Nation, despite the difficulties the Authorities must overcome if they are to enable all who live in the Country to enjoy a standard of life that respects their dignity and fundamental rights. The persistence of open or latent conflicts, particularly in West Africa, demands this engaged action to ensure that all the region's inhabitants may live in security and envisage a more tranquil future. I do not doubt that the competent bodies, both in the region and throughout the Continent, will make every effort to work in a well-coordinated partnership to defeat the instability that still prevails in many regions and to seek the ways and means for Africa to be ever more fully integrated in the globalization process. The encroaching desertification in Mali is also an urgent challenge to be confronted. Linked to the extreme climatic conditions of the Sahel, it gives rise to precarious conditions and poverty for a large number of your compatriots; they are often forced to choose exile in other countries or on other continents to provide for their own most basic needs and those of their loved ones. Today I would like to launch an appeal to the international community, inviting it to show ever greater solidarity and support to the countries in need of its aid. This commitment necessarily includes respect for the promises the industrialized countries have made to the poorer countries, particularly in the area of investments, public grants and the reduction of the national debt, with the constant goal of empowering people to undertake their own development. As you recall, Mali is a nation whose history, culture, values and religious traditions can be assets to the preservation of harmony and friendly coexistence in the Nation, creating the necessary conditions for lasting peace and giving rise to the establishment of increasingly coherent social relations. Efforts made to help society advance towards

democracy and pluralism must be encouraged, so that all Malians may benefit from the advantages of a growth that is not limited to the legitimate increase of material well-being, but allows people and society to blossom to the full in all their human and spiritual dimensions. The education of the young generations - by passing on the fundamental human values, eliminating illiteracy, enabling them to follow an educational programme, showing them the need for endeavour, inculcating in their consciences a moral and civic sense - is an essential element of this ongoing development which cannot be circumvented and which every nation is duty bound to encourage and promote. This education is carried out by means of a suitable scholastic system, from which no one must be excluded, but also by the promotion of courageous family policies that make it possible for parents to fulfil their mission as the educators of their children. It is essential that young people be encouraged to give the best of themselves, so that they may become decision-makers and leaders of their homeland in the future who will guide the nation on the paths to unity, stability and prosperity. Through you, I would also like once again to instil an awareness, in the countries concerned and throughout the international community, of the serious scourges of the trafficking in children and the work of minors who are a source of cheap labour for unscrupulous international organizations. By jolting consciences, I hope to inspire the necessary international cooperation to halt these inadmissible practices that are contemptuous of the primordial dignity of frail beings created in God's image and contrary to the most fundamental rights of children. Respectful dialogue and constructive relations between members of the different religious communities that make up a nation are a powerful support in strengthening peace and harmony among all citizens. To maintain and develop a spirit of mutual trust and collaboration, however, it is important that civil and religious leaders contribute ceaselessly to reinforcing the conditions for the exercise of true religious freedom. Believers are invited to show that God has made them members of the same family, clothed them with the same dignity and calls them to be increasingly committed to serving the common good. It is crucial "for the young to be taught the ways of respect and understanding, so that they will not be led to misuse religion itself to promote or justify hatred and violence" (*Address at the Umayyad Great Mosque, Damascus*, 6 May 2001, n. 3; *L'Osservatore Romano* English edition [ORE], 9 May 2001, p. 11). I encourage believers, united with all people of good will, to pursue the dialogue of life which acts to link knowledge and confidence that are vital to the good of the whole human family. You recall, Mr Ambassador, that the Catholic Community in Mali, which contributes in many ways to the Nation's development and cohesion, is respected and appreciated by the civil Authorities. I am very glad of it. In a spirit of reciprocal trust, it seems desirable that the various ecclesial and State institutions pursue a true dialogue to permit the Catholic Church in Mali to benefit from effective and permanent recognition as an institution that is fully part of society. In this way she will be able to carry out her spiritual mission among her members and serve more effectively through her institutions all the people of Mali without distinction. Through you, I address my cordial good wishes to the Bishops of Mali and all the members of the Catholic Community, and ask them to be generous witnesses of God's love and to contribute to building a united and brotherly nation in which each one feels fully united and respected. At the time when your mission is beginning, Mr Ambassador, I offer you my very best wishes for the noble task that awaits you, as I assure you that you will always find here with my collaborators an attentive welcome and cordial understanding. Upon Your Excellency, upon the people of Mali and upon their leaders, I wholeheartedly invoke an abundance of divine

Blessings.

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