



The Holy See

***ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI
TO H.E. MR. PETROS TSEGGAI ASGHEDOM
AMBASSADOR OF ERITREA
ACCREDITED TO THE HOLY SEE****

Thursday 1 December 2005

Mr Ambassador,

I am pleased to welcome you to the Vatican and to accept the Letters accrediting you as Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of the Republic of Eritrea to the Holy See. I thank you for the greetings which you bring from your President, His Excellency Mr Isaias Afwerki, and I ask you to convey my respectful gratitude to him and to assure him of my continuing prayers for the well-being of your nation.

The Holy See greatly values its diplomatic links with your country, which enable it to cooperate with your Government in the interests of peace and stability among the beloved peoples of the Horn of Africa. The Church shares with all people of good will a responsibility "to achieve a peaceful society, to overcome the temptation of confrontation between cultures, races and worlds that are different" (*Address to the Diplomatic Corps*, 12 May 2005). You know from sad experience the appalling human cost of war; let me assure you that the Holy See is eager to do all in its power to support the international community in its efforts to avoid further military escalation and to resolve the continuing conflicts in your part of Africa.

The principal victims of war are always the people whose lives are so badly disrupted by violence and destruction. Many are forced to flee from their homes, or to seek refuge in neighbouring states. The Church is close to refugees and displaced persons, "not only with her pastoral presence and material support, but also with her commitment to defend their human dignity" (cf. *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*, 505). In your country, where the effects of war are compounded by the additional burdens of drought and famine, the poverty of the people has

reached grave proportions; the Catholic Church is committed to show solidarity with them in their suffering and to offer practical assistance. As world leaders become increasingly aware of the need to provide effective aid to Africa, the Church is pleased to be associated with their fight against hunger, poverty and disease.

Even though they form a small proportion of the population of Eritrea, Catholics can make a significant contribution to national life, through their Christian witness and their commitment to promote the common good. True to her nature and mission, the Church always seeks to come to the aid of the poor and the sick, and to work tirelessly to promote the dignity of the human person, made in God's image. For this reason she welcomes the opportunity to cooperate with the Government of Eritrea and to place her considerable resources of personnel and expertise at the service of your people. I am confident that the Government in turn will wish to facilitate the Church's humanitarian endeavours, welcoming those missionaries who arrive from abroad and supporting the native clergy and religious who devote their whole lives to prayer and to the pastoral ministry. In particular I would ask that their right to exemption from military service be respected: Eritrea will be better served if they are free to pursue their Christian calling and respective vocations.

Indeed, I express my hope that concrete steps will be taken to implement as fully as possible your country's constitutional guarantee of religious liberty. As the Second Vatican Council teaches, this is a right based "on the very dignity of the human person as known through the revealed word of God and by reason itself" (*Dignitatis Humanae*, 2). The Catholic Church, accordingly, is deeply concerned that all citizens should be free to practise their faith and that no one should feel under threat or coercion of any kind in this regard. She also seeks to promote respectful dialogue and fraternity between different Christian traditions and between different religions, and in this way to contribute towards the peaceful coexistence of all the groups that make up Eritrean society. In seeking the freedom to carry out her mission of love among your people, the Church fervently wishes to hasten the day when all the citizens of your country will be able to live together in peace, prosperity and harmony.

Your Excellency, I am confident that the diplomatic mission which you begin today will consolidate the good relations that exist between the State of Eritrea and the Holy See. In offering you my best wishes for the years ahead, I would like to assure you that the various departments of the Roman Curia are always glad to provide help and support in the fulfilment of your duties. Upon you, your family and all the people of Eritrea I cordially invoke God's abundant blessings.

**L'Osservatore Romano* 2.12.2005 p.8.

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