



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI
TO H.E. Mrs CRISTINA CASTAÑER-PONCE ENRILE
NEW AMBASSADOR OF THE REPUBLIC OF THE PHILIPPINES
TO THE HOLY SEE**

Monday, 27 October 2008

Madam Ambassador,

I am pleased to receive you today as you present the Letters of Credence accrediting you as Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of the Republic of the Philippines to the Holy See. I reciprocate the warm greetings which you have graciously extended to me on behalf of Her Excellency, President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo, and I would ask you to convey my own best wishes for her well-being and that of all your fellow citizens.

The Filipino people are renowned for their warm generosity and the high value they place on friendship and family life. The Catholic faithful in your country-through their hunger for prayer, their lively devotion, and their eagerness to serve others-demonstrate a firm trust in God's loving providence. I am grateful for the unique contribution they have made and continue to make to the life of the local and universal Church, and I encourage all men and women of goodwill in your nation to devote themselves to forging bonds of peace and social harmony within your borders and across the globe.

For its part, and in a special way through its diplomatic activity, the Holy See seeks to engage the world in dialogue so as to promote the universal values that flow from human dignity and advance mankind on the road to communion with God and one another. The Catholic Church is eager to share the richness of the Gospel's social message, for it enlivens hearts with a hope for the fulfilment of justice and a love that makes all men and women truly brothers and sisters in Christ Jesus. She carries out this mission fully aware of the respective autonomy and competence of Church and State. Indeed, we may say that the distinction between religion and politics is a

specific achievement of Christianity and one of its fundamental historical and cultural contributions. The Church is equally convinced that State and religion are called to support each other as they together serve the personal and social well-being of all (cf. *Gaudium et Spes*, 76). This harmonious cooperation between Church and State requires ecclesial and civic leaders to carry out their public duties with undaunted concern for the common good. By cultivating a spirit of honesty and impartiality, and by keeping justice their aim, civil and ecclesial leaders earn the trust of the people and enhance a sense of the shared responsibility of all citizens to promote a civilization of love. All should be motivated by the desire to serve rather than to gain personally or to benefit a privileged few. Everyone shares in the task of strengthening public institutions so as to safeguard them from the corruption of factionalism and elitism. In this regard, it is encouraging to see the many initiatives undertaken at various levels of Filipino society to protect the weak, especially the unborn, the sick and the elderly.

Your Excellency, I appreciate the concern you have expressed on behalf of your Government for the well-being of Filipino migrant workers. Indeed, the Meeting of the Global Forum on Migration and Development hosted in Manila clearly attests to the Philippines' solicitude for all who leave their homeland in search of employment in a foreign land. Initiatives such as the Global Forum are fruitful when they recognize immigration as a resource for development rather than as an obstacle to it. At the same time, government leaders face numerous challenges as they strive to ensure that immigrants are integrated into society in a way that acknowledges their human dignity and affords them the opportunity to earn a decent living, with adequate time for rest and a due provision for worship. The just care of immigrants and the building up of a solidarity of labour (cf. *Laborem Exercens*, 8) requires governments, humanitarian agencies, peoples of faith and all citizens to cooperate with prudence and patient determination. Domestic and international policies aimed at regulating immigration must be based on criteria of equity and balance, and particular care is needed to facilitate the reunification of families. At the same time, conditions that foster increased work opportunities in peoples' places of origin are to be promoted as far as possible (cf. *Gaudium et Spes*, 66).

In this regard, Madam Ambassador, the leaders of your nation have passed legislation for comprehensive land reform with the aim of improving the living conditions of the poor. Carefully planned agrarian reforms can benefit a society by instilling a sense of common responsibility and stimulating individual initiative, making it possible for a nation both to feed its own and expand its participation in international markets so as to enhance opportunities for growth in the process of globalization. I pray that by implementing measures that foster the just distribution of wealth and the sustainable development of natural resources, Filipino farmers will be granted greater opportunities for increasing production and earning what they need to support themselves and their families.

Your Excellency, it is encouraging to see that your nation will continue to participate actively in international forums for the advancement of peace, human solidarity and interreligious dialogue.

You have indicated how these noble goals are intimately related to human development and social reform. In light of the Gospel, the Catholic Church has always been convinced that the transition from less humane to more humane conditions is not limited to merely economic or technological dimensions, but implies for each person the acquisition of culture, respect for the life and dignity of others, and acknowledgment of “the highest good, the recognition of God Himself, the author and end of these blessings” (*Populorum Progressio*, 21). I am confident that the Republic of the Philippines will continue to offer this holistic vision of the human person in world forums, and I join all Filipinos in praying that the peace of God may reign in the hearts and homes of all people.

Madam Ambassador, your presence here today is a pledge that the bonds of friendship and cooperation between your nation and the Holy See will continue to grow stronger in the years ahead. I assure you that the various agencies and dicasteries of the Roman Curia will always be ready to assist you in fulfilling your duties. Offering you my best wishes and prayers for the success of your mission, I invoke the blessings of Almighty God upon Your Excellency, your family and the beloved people of the Philippines.

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