



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI
TO H.E. Mrs DELIA CÁRDENAS CHRISTIE
NEW AMBASSADOR OF PANAMA TO THE HOLY SEE***
Friday, 30 October 2009

Madam Ambassador,

I am pleased to welcome you on this solemn occasion on which you, Your Excellency, are presenting the Letters of Credence accrediting you as Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of the Republic of Panama to the Holy See.

I thank you for the kind words which you have extended to me, and also for the respectful greeting on behalf of the President of the Republic, His Excellency Mr Ricardo Martinelli Berrocal. As I recall with esteem the courtesy and cordiality which he showed me during our recent meeting at Castel Gandolfo, I ask you to convey to him my best wishes for the success of his mission.

You, Your Excellency, are here as the representative of a nation that maintains constant and fruitful bilateral relations with the Holy See. The President of Panama's visit which I have just mentioned is a significant sign of the good understanding that exists and that was already demonstrated by the Accord signed on 1 July 2005. It is hoped that it will soon be ratified, thus making possible the creation of an ecclesiastical circumscription to provide pastoral assistance to the Panamanian Police Forces.

Within the framework of respective competencies and reciprocal respect, the Church, in order that her mission may not be confused with that of the State, cannot identify with any specific political agenda. She carries out her works in a natural religious and spiritual sphere which favours the promotion of the dignity of human beings and the safeguard of their fundamental rights. However this distinction does not imply indifference or mutual ignorance, because, although in their different capacities, Church and State cooperate in seeking the common good of the same citizens, placing themselves at the service of their personal and social vocations (cf. *Gaudium et Spes*, n. 76). In

the same manner, diplomacy seeks to promote the great cause of mankind and to increase harmony among peoples, and this is why the Holy See holds in high regard and esteem the work that today, you, Your Excellency, are undertaking.

The identity of your Country which has been forged over the course of centuries, like a mosaic of ethnic groups, peoples and cultures shows itself to be the entire human family as an eloquent sign that peaceful coexistence among people of diverse origins is possible, in a climate of communion and cooperation. This human plurality must be considered an enriching element and an aspect that should be strengthened more each day, in the awareness that the human factor is the first asset to be safeguarded and valued (cf. *Caritas in Veritate*, n. 25). In this regard, I encourage all of your fellow citizens to work for greater social, economic and cultural equality in the different sectors of society. So that by renouncing selfish interests, reinforcing solidarity and reconciling aspirations, in the words of Pope Paul vi, "the scandal of glaring inequalities" can be banished (*Populorum Progressio*, n. 9).

The message of the Gospel has played a fundamental and constructive role in shaping Panama's identity, forming part of this Country's spiritual patrimony and cultural heritage. One illuminating testimony of this is the Papal Bull *Pastoralis Officii Debitum*, with which, on 9 September 1513, Pope Leo X canonically erected the Diocese of *Santa María La Antigua*, the first on the American Continent's mainland. In order to commemorate the Fifth Centenary of this immensely significant event, the Church in the nation is preparing various initiatives, which demonstrate how rooted the ecclesial community is in its homeland. This community's only aim is the good of its own people, of whom it is a part and whom it has served and will continue to serve with noble ends and generosity. I ask God that this event may deepen the Christian life of all of the beloved sons and daughters of this nation, in such a way that faith may continue to be a source of inspiration to face, in a positive and worthwhile manner, the challenges which this Republic is currently confronting.

In this sense it is appropriate to acknowledge the numerous activities of human and social advancement that are carried out in Panama by the dioceses, parishes, religious communities, lay associations and apostolic movements, contributing decisively to enlivening the present time and to kindling the longing for a better future for the country. Of particular importance is the presence of the Church in the field of education and aid to the poor, the sick, the imprisoned and the emigrants, as well as in the defence of fundamental aspects such as: the commitment to social justice, the fight against corruption, the work of promoting peace, the inviolability of the right to human life from the moment of conception to that of natural death, as well as the safeguarding of the family founded on the marriage of a man and a woman. These are irreplaceable elements in the creation of a healthy social fabric and a thriving society, precisely thanks to the sound moral values that sustain it, ennoble it and give it dignity.

In this context, I cannot fail to recognize the commitment that the authorities of Panama have repeatedly shown to reinforcing the democratic institutions and building a public life on the solid

pillars of ethics. In this regard, relentless efforts are necessary to promote an efficient and independent judicial system, calling for transparency in all sectors and honest community administration and professionalism and diligence in the resolution of problems concerning citizens. All this will encourage the development of a just and fraternal society, in which no sector of the population is forgotten or exposed to violence and marginalization.

The present time invites all of us, the institutions and those responsible for the peoples' future, to reflect seriously on the phenomena that are being produced at international and local levels. It is worth mentioning the valuable role that Panama is playing in the political stabilization of Central America, in times such as the present in which the situation proves that the consistent and harmonious progress of the human community does not depend solely on economic development and technological discoveries. These aspects must necessarily be complemented by others of an ethical and spiritual nature, because a society progresses above all when it has plenty of upright people whose irreprehensible conduct shows their determination to do their utmost for the common good. These are people who also inculcate a true humanism in the new generations, which they sow in the family and cultivate in schools, so that the nation's vitality may be the product of an integral development of the person and of all people (cf. *Caritas in Veritate*, nn. 61, 70).

Madam Ambassador, before concluding our meeting, I renew my greeting and my welcome to you, Your Excellency, and to your loved ones, while at the same time wishing you success in your work, together with the staff of this diplomatic mission, for the promotion of your country, so close to the Pope's heart.

With these sentiments, I place in the hands of Mary Most Holy, *Nuestra Señora La Antigua*, the hopes and challenges of the beloved people of Panama, upon whom I invoke the Lord's abundant Blessings.

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