



The Holy See

PASTORAL JOURNEY
TO BENIN, UGANDA AND KHARTOUM (SUDAN)

WELCOME CEREMONY

ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS JOHN PAUL II

International Airport of Khartoum (Sudan)

Wednesday, 10 February 1993

*Dear Mister President of the Revolutionary Command Council,
Dear Members of the Government,
Dear Brother Bishops and faithful of the Church in the Sudan,
Distinguished Members of the Diplomatic Corps,*

As-salamu 'aleykom! (Peace be upon you.)

1. I have kissed the soil of the Sudan with profound sentiments of peace and goodwill. I give thanks to Almighty God who has led my pilgrim steps to this land, and gives me the opportunity to *speak on behalf of understanding, harmony and peace among believers* who, though they follow different traditions, nevertheless honour God in their hearts and seek to do his will in all things. In greeting all of you who have come here to welcome me, I make this ardent appeal to you: let us listen to the voices of our brothers and sisters, especially those oppressed by poverty, hunger and violence, as they cry out for justice and peace, and for a new era of dialogue and agreement.

I have had an intense desire to come to the Sudan, and I am therefore grateful to the civil authorities for making this visit possible. I am also grateful to the Catholic Bishops for their invitation to share, if only for a brief while, the life of the Catholic community here. As the Successor of the Apostle Peter, whom Jesus Christ placed over his Church, I have a binding duty to encourage and strengthen the faith of my brothers and sisters wherever they are, and especially

when that faith demands great courage and fidelity. When people are weak and poor and defenceless, I must raise my voice on their behalf. When they are homeless and suffering the consequences of drought, famine, disease and the devastations of war, I must be close to them and appeal on their behalf to those who can offer help, and above all to those who can advance the cause of justice and peace. Justice and peace: these are the conditions of life for which all mankind yearns. They are the necessary premise of development and progress. *I pray and hope for justice and peace for all the citizens of this land*, without reserve, regardless of their religion, social standing, ethnic background or colour.

2. To the attentive observer, the whole of Africa is undergoing striking transformations. Everywhere there are immense problems still to be faced. A stormy history has left a legacy of underdevelopment, ethnic rivalries and conflict. Endemic poverty has produced innumerable material and cultural deficiencies. Efforts to bring progress and development have not always coincided with the people's best interests, and in many cases past policies have left a burden of enormous international debt. But *new winds are also blowing*. Many people on this continent now realize that African solutions must be found to African problems, that individuals, families and groups must be enabled to contribute to their own advancement, and that therefore society must become more democratic, more respectful of legitimate differences, more stable through the rule of law, reflecting universally recognized human rights. The winds of change are demanding renewed structures of economic and political organization, structures which will genuinely respect human dignity and human rights.

In my Pastoral Visits I have been to a great many African countries. Over the years I have met most of Africa's leaders. Notwithstanding the challenges facing this Continent, I am convinced that there is *a solid basis for great hope in Africa's future*. Here in Khartoum, I wish to express that same hope with regard to the Sudan. This is a country of many different peoples, languages and customs. Apart from African traditional religion, two major religious traditions, Islam and Christianity, have coexisted in this territory for centuries. Today it is essential to recover the sense of mutual respect and cooperation, in the service of the common good, and in the frank and honest search for a just solution to the conflict which continues to reap such a terrible harvest of suffering. With this great hope in mind, I renew my appeal to the international community and the international organizations, not to fail the people of the Sudan, but to make further efforts to relieve immediate needs and to help lay the foundations of future development.

3. We Christians call Jesus Christ "the Prince of Peace": he is "our peace" (Eph. 2: 14). For the followers of Islam the term *salam* is so important that it constitutes one of the glorious divine names. For the 1992 *World Day of Peace* I wrote a Message which states that religion, "if it is lived authentically, cannot fail to bring forth fruits of peace and brotherhood, for it is in the nature of religion to foster an ever closer bond with the Godhead and to promote an increasingly fraternal relationship among people" (John Paul II, *Message for World Day of Peace 1992*, 2, 8 December 1991). The only struggle which religious motives can justify, *the only struggle worthy of man, is the*

moral struggle against man's own disordered passions, against every kind of selfishness, against attempts to oppress others, against every type of hatred and violence: in short, against everything that is the exact opposite of peace and reconciliation (Cf. *ibid.* 7). In this great human endeavour, as so many Muslims and Christians all around the world have shown, there is ample basis for cooperation and mutual accord.

4. The Catholic Church rejoices when people acquire a greater awareness of their dignity, for then they become more capable of discovering in themselves and in each other the image and likeness of the Creator, the work of whose hands they are (Cf. Ps 8: 5). Throughout this Continent the Church, in fulfilling her religious mission, also carries on a patient and persevering work of human promotion through education, health-care and assistance. She does this in obedience to the words of Jesus Christ, who taught us that true worship of God involves the service of our neighbour (Cf. Lk. 10: 27). All the Church asks for is the freedom to pursue her religious and humanitarian mission. This freedom is her right, for it is everyone's duty, the duty of individuals and of the State, to respect the conscience of every human being. Rigorous respect for the right to religious freedom is a major source and foundation of peaceful coexistence.

In the few hours of my visit, I will pray and celebrate the Eucharist with the Catholic community. I also look forward to meeting many followers of Islam. May Almighty God help us to grow in mutual understanding and in awareness of our grave responsibilities with regard to the true good of people.

Baraka Allah as-Sudan
(God bless the Sudan.)