



The Holy See

***ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS
POPE JOHN PAUL II
TO H.E. Mr MOHAMMAD HADI ABD KHODA'I
AMBASSADOR OF THE ISLAMIC REPUBLIC OF IRAN
TO THE HOLY SEE****

5 May 1997

Your Excellency,

I am pleased to welcome you to the Vatican and to accept the Letters of Credence by which you are appointed Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of the Islamic Republic of Iran to the Holy See. With gratitude for your President's greetings, I warmly reciprocate with the assurance of my prayers to Almighty God for the Iranian people and for their peace and well-being.

Your presence here today testifies to the formal ties which exist between the Islamic Republic of Iran and the Holy See and to our willingness to cooperate in matters of bilateral and multilateral interest. Diplomatic relations between the various States and the Holy See are clearly unique insofar as the Holy See, while enjoying age-old recognition in the community of nations and engaging in diplomacy in accordance with international law, has characteristics all its own. Its diplomatic activity reflects this difference, which determines the way in which it approaches questions of both national and international concern. The Pope, as Successor of the Apostle Peter and head of the universal Church, is called to confirm his brothers and sisters in the faith, and to strengthen the religious life of Catholics in every part of the world. It is not surprising therefore that the Holy See, relying on the friendship and cooperation of the countries in which the members of the Church live, follows with close interest their conditions of life and the role they play in society at large.

The Catholics of the Islamic Republic of Iran are a small minority, but they have been present in your country from the earliest centuries of the Christian era and have always been a part of the

rich cultural life of the nation. The Holy See counts on the help of the Iranian Authorities to ensure that they will continue to enjoy the freedom to profess their faith, as also to benefit from a sufficient number of Bishops, priests and other religious personnel. The Church in Iran, precisely because of its small numbers, needs the solidarity of other Churches which out of their generosity are willing to contribute the personnel required for adequate pastoral care.

The Holy See makes every effort to help the Catholic community of Iran to keep alive the many signs of the Christian presence, so that the churches and holy places in Iran will not become mere archaeological monuments or even be forgotten altogether. At the same time, that small community sees itself as truly Iranian, and the experience of centuries of living side by side with their Islamic neighbours can be extremely useful in fostering ever greater mutual understanding and cooperation between the followers of the Christian faith and Islamic believers everywhere.

This important question leads us to consider once more the commitment, of which I have often spoken and to which the Holy See firmly adheres, of promoting interreligious dialogue, and in particular of developing a permanent dialogue between the religions which have a common point of reference in the faith of Abraham. In [1985, at Casablanca in Morocco](#), I explained the Church's thought on this matter to thousands of young Muslims who came to hear me: "For us - Christians and Muslims - Abraham is a very model of faith in God, of submission to his will and of confidence in his goodness. We believe in the same God, the one God, the living God, the God who created the world and brings his creatures to their perfection" ([Speech to Young Muslims](#), 19 August 1985, No. 1). Consequently, the Holy See confidently looks to religious Authorities and leaders of Government to support in a respectful and correct way the growth of mutual knowledge and the progress of dialogue between believers and between religions.

This reference to our belief in the one God reminds us also of the duty to work together for the defence of fundamental human values. Your Excellency has mentioned areas in which such collaboration is possible, and I gladly concur with your expressed desire to see an extension of this cooperation in the future. Outstanding among the values to be defended are freedom of religion and of conscience, and with them the other rights which flow from the dignity of the person and of peoples. Of particular concern to believers must be the advancement of justice and solidarity, so essential to the welfare of the vulnerable and needy members of the human family.

Only in a world of justice and peace can people grow in obedience to God and in generous service to their fellow human beings. The responsibility of States to work for such an international situation is no mere pragmatic demand of their potential interests; it springs from the very nature of the responsibility which the leaders of nations assume in the service of their people. Respect for international law and commitment to negotiation as the means of resolving tensions - also with assistance from the international community itself when necessary - are imperatives of the task of building a better world in which goodness and religion can flourish. Today we must all hope for and support a new phase of international cooperation, more solidly based on humanitarian

concern and effective help for the suffering, and less dependent on the cold calculation of technical and economic exchanges and benefits.

Iran's profound Islamic traditions and the religious sensitivity of its people and leaders are motives for a well-founded hope of ever increasing openness and cooperation with the international community. The Holy See for its part will always be ready to work in harmony with those who serve the cause of peace and uphold the human dignity with which the Creator has endowed every human being.

Your Excellency, I wish you well as you begin your lofty mission as your country's diplomatic representative to the Holy See, and I assure you of the ready cooperation of the various offices of the Roman Curia. My prayers are filled with confidence that the Most High will multiply his blessings to you and to the beloved Iranian people.

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