



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF THE HOLY FATHER
POPE JOHN PAUL II
TO H.E. MR JOHN P. BOJANG
NEW AMBASSADOR OF THE REPUBLIC OF THE GAMBIA
TO THE HOLY SEE***

28 May 1998

Mr Ambassador, It is with great pleasure that I welcome you today to the Vatican and accept the Letters by which you are accredited Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of the Republic of the Gambia to the Holy See. This occasion, as well as the cordial meeting which I had three months ago with your President, His Excellency Yahya Jammeh, rekindle the happy memory of my Pastoral Visit to your country six years ago: the people of the Gambia remain dear to me and ever close to my heart. I ask you kindly to convey to the President and the members of Government my warm greetings and to assure them of my esteem and respect for all Gambians. As Your Excellency has noted, our modern world is experiencing rapid changes in the social, economic and political spheres. Sometimes these changes are positive and are a source of hope and promise; at other times, they seem arbitrary at best and bring much anxiety and many problems. It is in great part due to changes of this latter type that the continent of Africa, despite its immense human and natural resources, faces great difficulties as it strives to meet the challenges of poverty, hunger and ethnic rivalry, each of which is complicated by an ever growing materialism, the tragic spread of AIDS and the deadly onslaught of the drug culture. High moral ideals and strict adherence to the principles of goodness, truth and justice in human relationships are necessary if adequate responses to these complex situations are to be found. And this is true not for Africa alone, but for the world community at large. In fact, it is respect for universal moral norms that, as I wrote in my Encyclical Letter *Veritatis Splendor*, protects “the inviolable personal dignity of every human being” and helps to “preserve the human social fabric and its proper fruitful development” (*loc. cit.*, No. 97). It is just such values and principles which guide the Holy See in its activity in the field of international diplomacy. It is these same moral ideals which the Catholic Church seeks to uphold and foster in her own work in the various areas of social service wherever she is present, especially in education and healthcare. Here I wish to thank Your Excellency for your words of appreciation of the Church’s role in contributing to the national development of the Gambia. Indeed, the Church is a willing partner in the authentic development of all peoples. This development requires that the tensions and conflicts which continue to be a threat throughout the world be overcome. And these tensions and conflicts cannot be properly overcome unless efforts aimed at increasing justice, peace and security have individual human beings — in the fullness of their inalienable rights and God-given dignity — as their explicit and manifest object. For it is only when the human person is placed resolutely and

unambiguously at the centre and forefront of every endeavour to share knowledge, technology, resources and skills that genuine progress can take place. The challenge, then, is to build an ever more united, just and peaceful world where all sectors of society — at the local, national and international levels — can work together for the good of all. It is not economic interests alone which must determine and guide this work, but keen attention to people's cultural, ethical and spiritual needs. In this perspective, development is first and foremost a question of people: people are the subject and the aim of true development. People must be the focus of all that is done to improve living conditions. People must be active agents, not passive recipients, in any process aimed at fostering integral human development. It is important to reach out and offer material assistance to those in need, but people must also be helped to discover the values which will enable them to improve their lives and to claim their rightful place in society with dignity and justice (cf. *Message for the 1987 World Day of Peace*, No. 6). Social choices themselves have consequences that either promote or debase the true good of the human person in society. In the field of development, and especially in the area of assistance programmes, projects are often put forward which claim to be "value free" but which in fact promote values which are contrary to life and true freedom. When this happens we must declare clearly and forcefully that such programmes are an affront to human dignity and human freedom, that they violate authentic justice and solidarity. Whatever impedes true freedom militates against the development of society and of social institutions. Exploitation, threats, forced subjection, the denial of opportunities by one sector of society to another contradict the very notion of human development. Without freedom and security, the conditions for development are lacking. Not only individuals but also nations must be able to share in making the choices which affect them. The freedom which nations need in order to ensure their growth and development as equal partners in the family of nations is dependent on the establishment of mutual trust and respect among them. The principles of goodness, truth and justice must ever be the hallmarks of all efforts, both individual and corporate, aimed at building a future truly worthy of the human family. Mr Ambassador, I offer my good wishes as you begin your diplomatic mission, and assure you of the ready cooperation of the offices of the Holy See in the fulfilment of your duties. Upon yourself and all the beloved people of the Gambia I invoke God's blessings of prosperity and

peace.

* *Insegnamenti di Giovanni Paolo II*, vol. XXI, 1 p. 1076-1079.

L'Osservatore Romano 29.5. 1998 p.6.

L'Osservatore Romano. Weekly Edition in English n. 23 p.7, 9.

© Copyright 1998 - Libreria Editrice Vaticana