



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF THE HOLY FATHER
POPE JOHN PAUL II
TO H.E. DR VLATKO KRALJEVIÆ
AMBASSADOR OF BOSNIA AND HERCEGOVINA
TO THE HOLY SEE***

Friday, 11 September 1998

Mr Ambassador,

1. I am pleased to welcome you on this occasion for the presentation of the Letters by which the Presidency of Bosnia and Hercegovina accredits you as Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary to the Holy See. I thank you for the courteous words you have just addressed to me and for your observations on the progress made, the future projects and the understandable difficulties your country is experiencing.

I would first like to convey, through your kindness, my respectful and cordial greeting to the Collegial Presidency and the Council of Ministers. Through them I would then like to renew my sentiments of affection and closeness to all the peoples who live in the country: they have a special place in my heart and in my prayers.

I still have a vivid picture of the scenes during the memorable visit Providence allowed me to make to Sarajevo on 12-13 April last year. It is the city that symbolizes our century, because the events which happened there had an effect on the whole of Europe. I regarded that meeting as an encouragement to all people of goodwill not to let themselves be discouraged in their efforts to build up the peace so recently achieved; as an invitation to all nations to look at the Balkans with new eyes; as an exhortation to continue tirelessly on the arduous but fruitful path of sincere dialogue.

2. From its independence until today, the Holy See's concern for Bosnia and Hercegovina has been constant. This is evident by what has already been done. While the war was raging, the Holy See was committed to promoting peace, pointing to dialogue as the most suitable way to guarantee respect for the fundamental and inalienable rights of every person in accordance with his own nationality. It also strove to alleviate the sufferings of the defenceless peoples throughout the region devastated by the war.

Since the first signs of conflict, the Holy See has done all it could to prevent suffering and death, and to promote a sincere and constructive dialogue between the parties. Now that the weapons are silent at last after the bloody trial of a devastating conflict, the Holy See continues to pursue the goal of encouraging the consolidation of peace with real equality for the peoples who constitute Bosnia and Hercegovina, exhorting them to mutual respect and honest, constant dialogue, in a climate of true freedom.

I firmly hope that the suffering of the recent painful experience will contribute to active collaboration among the nations in the Balkan area and to promotion of the effective recognition of human rights and the rights of the peoples in the area of South-Eastern Europe, a necessity which is all the more compelling as new centres of conflict flare up.

3. Peace in Bosnia and Hercegovina is being consolidated day by day, thanks to the commitment of the local authorities and the efforts of the international community, committed to implementing the Washington and Dayton peace accords in the region.

The urgent task of the country's moral and material reconstruction now remains. This is a demanding but necessary duty, to which the future of all Bosnia and Hercegovina is linked. In rebuilding the country stricken by the recent war, it is of course necessary to invest in infrastructures, which are so vital to the recovery of civilian life and to economic growth; but it is first necessary to enable the citizen to enjoy the rights and dignity which are his due. In fact, the individual is the most valuable good in any civil society. In this context the problem of refugees and exiles who rightly ask to return to their homes cannot be avoided. I earnestly invite all the parties involved not to be discouraged by the difficulties and to work for a just solution to this tragedy.

I hope that conditions can be created as soon as possible for the peaceful and safe return of those who fled from the threatening horrors of the war or who were violently expelled from their land. Everyone must be guaranteed the real possibility of returning home, to resume normal life in serenity and peace. This presupposes the elimination of every threat of violence and the establishment of an environment of mutual trust in a social context marked by safety and lawfulness.

This path requires the involvement of the many sound forces which form society as a whole. The Church, in her own capacity, has not failed and will not fail to make her convinced and concrete contribution so that the hearts of all may advance on the path of dialogue and sincere co-operation. However, the political and institutional forces have a great responsibility in guaranteeing the identity, development and prosperity of all the peoples who constitute Bosnia and Hercegovina. This is a task that requires patience, time and tenacity, and cannot be imposed. The possibility of unforeseen events must not discourage anyone, but only engage the wisdom of all in correcting and improving the plans already made.

4. Mr Ambassador, despite the promising prospects opened by a peace at last restored, it cannot be denied that there are also shadows that must be dispelled. There is still deep anxiety about various attacks in recent months, which sow terror and rob local communities of their tranquillity. These acts represent a serious obstacle to the peace, reconciliation and forgiveness which are so necessary for the future of the whole region. Nothing is built on violence! Bosnia and Hercegovina is a country in which three peoples live together and where various religious groups are active. Each must

be provided with the same economic, social and cultural opportunities; each must be given the possibility to express his own identity, while fully respecting the others.

A multiethnic and multireligious society like Bosnia and Hercegovina must be based on respect for differences, on mutual esteem, real equality, active collaboration, constructive solidarity, constant and honest dialogue. Only in this way will the communities concerned be able to transform the country into a true "region of peace". Each must therefore resist *the temptation to dominate the others* out of a desire for control and out of personal or group selfishness. On the contrary, it will be indispensable to *foster a truly democratic life*, joined with authentic religious and cultural freedom aimed at the constant advancement of the individual and the common good.

Suitable legislative provisions must therefore guarantee the real equality of all members of civil society, and State institutions should promote this equality, using every legitimate means to protect it.

5. I cannot fail to mention, Mr Ambassador, the Catholic Church's current situation in your country. She seeks no privileges for herself; she only wants to fulfil the mandate received from her divine Founder, freely accomplishing her activity at the service of all. This is the reason why she would like to see the restoration of the property confiscated in the communist period or during the recent conflict. This is a proof of justice and a sign of the democratic nature of the institutions of the country you are called to represent. Obviously, what the Catholic Church asks for herself she also asks for the country's other religious communities.

As I close these words of greeting and best wishes, I would like to entrust to the heavenly protection of the Most Holy Mother of God the efforts for building peace and for material and spiritual reconstruction which Bosnia and Hercegovina, with the help of the international community, is carrying out. May the intercession of the Blessed Virgin Mary shower an abundance of God's blessings upon all the peoples of this country, which is particularly dear to my heart. I accompany these desires with warm wishes for your fruitful mission to the Holy See.

**L'Osservatore Romano. Weekly edition in English* n.38 p.4.

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