



The Holy See

FAREWELL CEREMONY - INTERNATIONAL AIRPORT OF DAMASCUS

ADDRESS OF JOHN PAUL II

May 8, 2001

*Mr President,
Distinguished Syrian Friends,*

1. As I take my leave of the ancient land of Syria, I am filled with a sense of gratitude. I give thanks above all to Almighty God for enabling me to continue my Jubilee Pilgrimage of faith on the two thousandth anniversary of the birth of Jesus Christ. I am grateful to Saint Paul, who has been my travelling companion at every step of the way.

I am especially grateful to you, Mr President, and to the members of the Government, who have welcomed me with open hearts and extended to me the hand of friendship. The Syrian people are renowned for their hospitality, and during these days they have made a pilgrim feel at home. I shall not forget this kindness.

I thank the Christian community, and in particular Their Beatitudes the Patriarchs and the Bishops, for the way in which they have accompanied me on my Pilgrimage.

I shall cherish the memory of my visit to the Umayyad Mosque and of the courteous welcome I received from His Excellency the Minister of the Waqf, and His Eminence the Grand Mufti and the Muslim community.

I pray that Syria's long tradition of harmonious relations between Christians and Muslims will endure and become even stronger, as a testimony before the world that religion, as adoration of Almighty God, sows the seed of peace in peoples's hearts. By responding to the deepest yearnings of the human spirit, it enriches and unites the human family on its path through history.

2. Syria is an ancient land with a glorious past. Yet in some ways yours is still a young nation which in a relatively short time and through difficult circumstances has achieved a great deal. My pilgrim prayer is that Syria will move confidently and serenely into a new and promising future, and that your country will flourish in an era of well-being and tranquillity for all its people.

Syria is a vital presence in the life of this whole region, whose peoples have long suffered the tragedy of war and conflict. But for the door of peace to open, fundamental issues of truth and justice, of rights and responsibilities must be resolved. The world looks to the Middle East with hope and concern, expectantly awaiting every sign of constructive dialogue. Many serious obstacles remain, yet the first step towards peace must be a steadfast conviction that a solution is possible within the parameters of international law and the resolutions of the United Nations. I appeal once more to all the peoples involved, and to their political leaders, to recognize that confrontation has failed and will always fail. Only a just peace can bring the conditions needed for the economic, cultural and social development to which the peoples of the region have a right.

Thank you, Mr President. My thanks to you all: *Shukran!*

May your future be filled with Almighty God's blessings. His peace be with you always: *As-salámu 'aláikum!*