



The Holy See

***ADDRESS OF JOHN PAUL II
TO THE NEW AMBASSADOR OF THE REPUBLIC
OF NIGER TO THE HOLY SEE****

Friday, 17 May 2002

Mr Ambassador,

1. I am pleased to welcome you on the occasion of the presentation of the Letters accrediting you as Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of the Republic of Niger to the Holy See.

Social progress that serves human values, plus international solidarity for real need

I thank you for the kind words you have addressed to me and the greetings you have conveyed to me from President Tandja Mamadou. I would be grateful in return if you would kindly express to him and to the people of Niger my cordial good wishes for their happiness and prosperity.

2. I am particularly moved by your attention to the Church's humanitarian involvement in your country. One can only hope that the efforts achieved by the different segments of the people of Niger will contribute to its overall development, not limited to better material well-being but embracing the fulfilment of the person in his human and spiritual dimensions and the progress of life in society. In the first place, it is the task of local political, social and economic leaders to engage with great generosity and honesty - for every form of public service is a service to the people - in promoting initiatives that will allow all the citizens to be leading agents in building the nation, and to profit equitably from the benefits of development. Many of the country's citizens live in conditions of extreme poverty, caused by the scarcity of food and by crop failure. With all my heart I hope that the international community will continue and intensify its support to meet the needs of the people and to reduce the country's external debt in order to give new hope to future generations. No one can refuse solidarity to those who lack the vital necessities and who, in fact, are wounded in their human dignity. It is also well known that in the long term, this situation of distress can only generate local or regional conflict.

3. As you know, the war against poverty in all its forms also takes the form of eliminating the scourge of illiteracy. Education, which is a fundamental human right of men and women, can only encourage the human and moral growth and social development of a nation, offering the younger generations the possibility of being involved in transforming society and in putting into practice such universal values as solidarity, a sense of the common good, respect for human life and hospitality to the stranger. In this spirit, putting in place more suitable structures for teaching is necessary for the intellectual, human, spiritual, moral and civic formation of persons. Through her work in the education sector, the Catholic Church is always ready to put her institutions and experience at the service of this kind of plan for the integral advancement of persons and the building of society, in accord with her inner spirit and the values she represents. To carry out this major mission, she needs the esteem and confidence of the civil authorities.

4. Mr Ambassador, you emphasize the increasingly important role played by the Holy See in the resolution and prevention of conflicts in the world. The Church hopes to play her part in strengthening unity and brotherhood among individuals and peoples with respect for the human, spiritual and cultural riches that are proper to each one. In collaboration with the other members of the nation, she wishes to commit herself to doing her utmost to enable the people of Niger to live in peace, a fruit of justice, equity and the respect for human rights, including the right to religious freedom, which is a fundamental aspect written into your country's Constitution.

In the present context where many conflicts continue to stain the African continent with blood, the religions have the duty to participate in establishing a just and lasting peace. As was stressed at the meeting of Assisi last 24 January, they are called to collaborate with one another and to focus on eliminating the social and cultural ills that lead to violence, contempt for others and the disintegration of human solidarity. In joining forces to teach the dignity of the person and in awakening consciences to the sense of human brotherhood, the religions build bridges between people and thus render a precious service to the development of peoples. I hope that the existing relations between Christians and Muslims in Niger, that are based on knowledge and true friendship, will maintain this spirit of mutual understanding, to dispel fear and to encourage trust among individuals.

5. It is in this spirit of dialogue with all the living forces of the country without distinction that the Catholic Church in Niger intends to collaborate fraternally and loyally in building a nation where each one will benefit from the fruits of development and pay special attention to the poor. I am pleased that the Catholic community, even though numerically it is a minority, is recognized and appreciated by the civil leaders and by the people of Niger. Permit me, Mr Ambassador, through you to extend a warm greeting to the Bishops and Catholics who live in your noble country. After Christ's example, desiring to put herself at the service of one and all in such different areas as health care, education, social and charitable assistance, the Catholic Church ardently hopes that by using means which foster and strengthen solidarity, she can make a specific and decisive contribution to a true culture of peace (cf. *Ecclesia in Africa*, n. 138).

6. Mr Ambassador, at the moment when your mission to the Apostolic See begins officially, I offer you my cordial good wishes for the noble task that awaits you. Be assured that you will find among my collaborators the attentive and understanding welcome you may need.

7. Your Excellency, upon you, upon the leaders of the nation and upon all the people of Niger, I cordially invoke the Almighty's blessings in abundance.

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