



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF JOHN PAUL II
TO H.E. MR OSMAN DURAK,
AMBASSADOR OF TURKEY ACCREDITED TO THE HOLY SEE***

Saturday, 21 February 2004

Your Excellency, I extend a warm welcome to you as I accept the Letters of Credence appointing you Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of the Republic of Turkey to the Holy See. One of the very first pilgrimages of my Pontificate brought me to your nation, "as a messenger of peace and as a friend" (*Farewell Address at Smyrna, 30 November 1979*). With the memories of that historic trip indelibly etched in my mind, I thank you for the greetings which you bring from President Ahmet Necdet Sezer, and I gladly offer my own good wishes to the authorities and people of your country. I would ask you to assure them of my prayers. You have referred to Turkey's status as a democratic State governed by the rule of law and in which all citizens enjoy equal rights. Indeed, the rule of law and equality of rights are essential traits for any modern society that truly seeks to safeguard and promote the common good. In fulfilling this task, the clear distinction between the civil and religious spheres allows each of these sectors to exercise its proper responsibilities effectively, with mutual respect and in complete freedom of conscience. I am pleased to note that the Constitution of the Republic recognizes this freedom of conscience, as well as freedom of religion, worship and instruction. These constitutional guarantees, once they have become part of ordinary legislation and therefore of the living fabric of society, permit all citizens regardless of religious belief or affiliation to make their contribution to the building up of Turkish society. The nation is thus able to benefit from the hope and the moral qualities that draw their strength from the deeply held religious convictions of the people. In light of this, and as Turkey prepares to establish new relations with Europe, I join the Catholic population in looking forward to recognition on the part of the Turkish authorities and institutions of the Church's juridical status in your country. In no way does the Church seek special privileges or preferential treatment for herself; rather she simply insists that the fundamental human rights of her members be respected and that Catholics be free to exercise those rights. As I had occasion to point out at the beginning of this year, in a pluralistic society the secularity of the State allows for "communication between the different spiritual dimensions and the nation" (*Address to the Diplomatic Corps Accredited to the Holy See, 12 January 2004*, No. 3). The Church and the State, therefore, are not rivals but partners: in healthy dialogue with each other they can encourage integral human development and social harmony. It is in this same regard that I would express my hope that the Parliamentary Committee on Human Rights of the Turkish National Assembly will see fit to respond in an adequate manner to the petition presented to it last September concerning the common religious and pastoral needs of the Christian and non-Muslim minorities living in Turkey. As my Predecessor and former Apostolic Delegate to your country Blessed Pope John

XXIII noted in his Encyclical Letter *Pacem in Terris*, the question of peace cannot be separated from that of human dignity and human rights. In other words, the far-reaching problems of order in world affairs cannot be properly addressed without dealing with issues of morality and ethical behaviour. Accordingly, peace and harmony within nations and between peoples and States require an ever more inclusive and participatory exercise of political authority, even at the international level, and greater transparency and accountability at every level of public life. Identifying truth, justice, love and freedom as the four pillars of peace, Pope John called for a nobler vision of public authority and "boldly challenged the world to think beyond its present state of disorder to new forms of international order commensurate with human dignity" (*Message for the 2003 World Day of Peace*, No. 6). One of the primary means for securing this world order, and hence for pursuing peace, is international law, which today is called more and more to become a law of peace in justice and solidarity. Thus the international community in general has a special role to play in promoting human dignity, fostering the freedom of peoples and preparing cultures and institutions for the necessary task of building peace. The Catholic Church lends her full support to activities aimed at restoring peace and bringing about reconciliation. For this reason I welcome the news of the progress being made in moving towards a just settlement of the Cyprus question. I heartily encourage the parties involved to spare no effort in hastening the re-unification and pacification of the island. Within the wider international community, the United Nations has a particular role to play. While there is need for "a reform which would enable the United Nations Organization to function effectively for the pursuit of its own stated ends" (*Message for the 2004 World Day of Peace*, No. 7), this international body still represents the most suitable agency for confronting the grave challenges facing the human family of the twenty-first century. Among these challenges, the deadly scourge of terrorism represents an especially pernicious problem: for it often defies the traditional logic of a legal system set up for regulating relations between sovereign States. In the ongoing fight against terrorism, therefore, international law is called to develop multilateral legal instruments capable of effectively monitoring, counteracting and preventing this heinous crime. I would here renew the expression of my prayerful solidarity with the nation in the wake of recent terrorist attacks in your country. Mr Ambassador, I am confident that your mission to the Holy See will strengthen the bonds of understanding and cooperation between us. You can be assured that the various offices of the Roman Curia will always be ready to assist you in the discharge of your high duties. Upon yourself and the beloved people of Turkey I cordially invoke the abundant blessings of Almighty

God.

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