



The Holy See

***ADDRESS OF JOHN PAUL II
TO H.E. MR ALBERT EDWARD ISMAIL YELDA
AMBASSADOR OF THE REPUBLIC OF IRAQ TO THE HOLY SEE****

Monday, 15 November 2004

Your Excellency,

I am pleased to extend a warm welcome to you as I accept the Letters of Credence appointing you as Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of the Republic of Iraq to the Holy See. I thank you for the kind greetings which you bring from President Sheikh Ghazi Ajeel Al-Yawar, and I gladly offer my own good wishes to the authorities and people of your country. Through the presence of the Apostolic Nuncio I have continued to remain close to the dear people of Iraq since the beginning of this period of conflict. I would ask you to assure them of my ongoing concern for the many victims of terrorism and violence. I pray that they will be spared further suffering and receive the assistance they need from international humanitarian organizations.

Your ancient culture has been described as the "cradle of civilization" and has boasted the presence of Christians since the beginning of Christianity itself. Indeed, it has been a fine example of the many ways in which the adherents of different religions can live in peace and harmony. It is my ardent hope that as Iraq moves towards the realization of democracy, these hallmarks of her history will again become an essential part of society.

Your Excellency has remarked on the importance of protecting the dignity of every human person. Essential to this is the rule of law as an integral element of government. Preserving this fundamental principle is basic 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 to exercise its proper responsibilities effectively, with mutual respect and in complete freedom of conscience. It is my hope that the Iraqi people will continue to promote their long tradition of tolerance, always recognizing the right to freedom of worship and religious

instruction. Once these fundamental rights are protected by ordinary legislation and become an enduring part of the living fabric of society, they will enable all citizens, regardless of religious belief or affiliation, to make their proper contribution to the building up of Iraq. In this way the country can express the deeply held religious convictions of all its peoples through the creation of a society that is truly moral and just. I can assure Your Excellency that the entire Catholic Church, and in a special way the Chaldean Christians present in your country since the time of the Apostles, is committed to assisting your people in constructing a more peaceful and stable nation.

Iraq is currently in the throes of the difficult process of transition from a totalitarian regime to the formation of a democratic State in which the dignity of each person is respected and all citizens enjoy equal rights. Authentic democracy is possible "only in a State ruled by law", and requires that "the necessary conditions be present for the advancement both of the individual through education and formation in true ideals, and . . . through the creation of structures of participation and shared responsibility" (cf. Encyclical Letter *Centesimus Annus*, 46). As you prepare your people to undertake the task of freely electing the men and women who will lead the Iraq of tomorrow, I encourage the current government in its efforts to make certain that these elections are fair and transparent giving all eligible citizens an equal opportunity in this democratic right which they are encouraged to exercise.

The struggle to overcome the challenges brought about by poverty, unemployment and violence is also currently faced by Iraq. May your government work untiringly to settle disputes and conflicts through dialogue and negotiation, having recourse to military force only as a last resort. Accordingly, it is essential that the State, with the assistance of the International Community, promote mutual understanding and tolerance among its various ethnic and religious groups. This will enable the people of the region to create an environment that is not only committed to justice and peace but is also capable of sustaining the necessary economic growth and development integral for the well-being of your citizens and the country itself. Men and women can together eliminate the social and cultural causes of division and conflict "by teaching the greatness and dignity of the human person, and by spreading a clearer sense of the oneness of the human family" (*Message for the 2002 World Day of Peace*, 12).

Mr Ambassador, I am confident that your mission will strengthen the bonds of understanding and cooperation between the Republic of Iraq and the Holy See. Be assured that the various offices of the Roman Curia are always ready to assist you in the discharge of your high duties. Upon yourself and the beloved people of Iraq I cordially invoke the abundant blessings of Almighty God.

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