



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF THE HOLY FATHER
POPE JOHN PAUL II
H.E. Mr. HORACE REGINALDO MONDAY JR.,
TO THE AMBASSADOR OF THE GAMBIA TO THE HOLY SEE***

Monday, 14 November 1988

Mr Ambassador,

I am pleased to welcome you today and to accept the Letters of Credence by which His Excellency Alhaji Sir Dawda Kairaba Jawara, President of the Republic of The Gambia, has accredited you as Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary to the Holy See. The greetings and good wishes which you have conveyed on his behalf are very much appreciated and I would ask you to assure His Excellency of my prayers for his well-being and for the welfare of all the people of your country.

As Your Excellency has said, the relations between the Gambia and the Holy See are characterized by cordiality and mutual respect, for we have a common concern for the promotion of peace, justice and freedom. It is my hope that during your mission the links between us will be further strengthened, and that the contribution which the Catholic Church is making to the integral development of your country can be increased.

It is with satisfaction that I note your reference to the fact that the Church played a significant role in the advancement of The Gambia as a nation state even before the advent of Independence in 1965. Beginning with the activity of the first missionaries who came among your people, the Church has tried to serve as a leaven for the transformation of society. As you are aware, the Church views her contribution in this sphere as an essential part of her religious mission. She considers that her initiatives in sponsoring relief programmes and her efforts to improve the quality of life are in fulfilment of her responsibilities towards God and neighbour. She like wise holds that there should be no opposition between professional and social activities on the one hand and religious life on the other.

The Church's contribution to the development of your country has been guaranteed by your Government's protection of the precious right to religious freedom. Concerning this fundamental human right, I observed in [my Message for this year's World Day of Peace](#): "The civil and social right to religious freedom, inasmuch as it touches the most intimate sphere of the spirit, is a point of reference of the other fundamental rights and in some way becomes a measure of them... The State cannot claim authority, direct or indirect, over a person's religious convictions. It cannot arrogate to itself the right to impose or to impede the profession or public practice of religion by a person or a community".

Your Excellency refers to the pioneering role of the Church in the field of education as one which has left an indelible mark on the history of your country. I am pleased to note that the Catholic schools in the Gambia have made such a notable contribution and that they enjoy a reputation for excellence. The Church strives to provide a quality education which is imbued with the Christian Gospel. Through her schools she tries to promote the full development of the human person for the welfare of society.

I very much appreciate your kind words about the Church's continuing relief efforts in the region of the Sahel. These programmes are primarily agricultural and therefore concern the majority of your people, who live in rural areas. I am pleased to note that the establishment of The John Paul II Foundation for the Sahel has greatly benefited the people of the Gambia as well as the other countries of the region. It is my hope that these programmes, by providing aid to drought victims and by funding special projects in the fight against desertification and its causes, will serve to maintain the peace and stability which are indeed a necessary condition for development.

You mention that your Government has always welcomed the Holy See's ceaseless efforts on the international level at the service of peace and understanding amongst all peoples and nations. As Your Excellency knows, these initiatives are based upon the fundamental dignity of every human person made in the image and likeness of God.

The common dignity which we share as members of the human race demands that we should live in harmony and mutual respect, and that we should devote ourselves to work for the common good. Peaceful co-existence will only be achieved when everyone is convinced of our universal brotherhood.

Mr. Ambassador, as you begin your mission, I assure you of my prayers for the successful performance of your duties. The departments of the Holy See will always be ready to assist you in the fulfilment of your responsibilities. Upon yourself and upon the President, Government and people of the Gambia I invoke God's abundant blessings.

*AAS 81 (1989), p. 657-659.

Insegnamenti di Giovanni Paolo II, vol. XI, 4 pp. 1550-1552.

L'Attività della Santa Sede 1988 pp. 1031-1032.

L'Osservatore Romano 15.11.1988 p.5.

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