



The Holy See

***ADDRESS OF JOHN PAUL II
TO H.E. MR AFIF HENDAOU
AMBASSADOR OF TUNISIA****

Thursday, 27 May 2004

Mr Ambassador,

I welcome Your Excellency with pleasure to the Vatican on the occasion of the presentation of the Letters accrediting you as Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of the Republic of Tunisia to the Holy See. I thank you for conveying to me the kind words of H.E. Mr Zine Le Abidine Ben Ali, President of the Republic, and I would be grateful if you would reciprocate to him my cordial wishes for his person and for his compatriots. I ask the Most High to support the efforts of all Tunisians to build a society that is more and more fraternal and supportive, in which each citizen may benefit from the progress made and achieve his or her legitimate aspiration to live in justice and peace. You have recalled, Mr Ambassador, the long tradition of tolerance and acceptance that mark Tunisia, as well as your Country's deep attachment to the cause of peace. In the face of the current international situation, marked by the intolerable violence of terrorism and undermined by the instability of several regions of the world, especially the Middle East, it is urgently necessary for people of good will to join forces for peace. The Holy See is sparing no effort to achieve this, especially by reminding the individual members of the international community of their responsibility in this context. As I have often affirmed, only recourse to negotiations in an honest and demanding dialogue will enable adversaries and the belligerent to find new ways to settle conflicts and restore a situation of justice and mutual respect. I therefore appeal once again to those who have authority in the war process. They must remember that their priority mission is to offer to persons and peoples the gift of peace, so that each one may plan his own future and that of his family with confidence and serenity. Violence and war, as we know only too well, cannot solve conflicts. On the contrary, most often they inflict such injuries and damage that they generate lasting hatred between persons and peoples and destroy, sometimes for long periods, all possibility of dialogue and respect. I rejoice at the broad convergence of views you drew attention to on this matter between your Country and the Holy See. I hope that our joint efforts may be the source of significant progress for world peace, for we cannot be passive before the dramas that are tearing our world apart and are such a grim portent for the generations to come. I am thinking in particular of the conflict in the Holy Land that has been drawn out for so many years and seriously wounds the conscience of all believers. The long experience of Christian faith in its dialogue with human societies in the course of history has shown that religion, in its essential truth, is a powerful means of humanization for mankind. It invites all to respect the Creator and his creation; it reveals to people their dignity as creatures, called to have

dominion over the world, directing their history in accordance with God's plans, always seeking the truth and acting as justice and the law require. These features of "human" conduct apply to relations between individuals and between groups in the heart of society, but they also apply for relations between nations and in international relations. As I recalled in my last *Message for the World Day of Peace*: "Law is the first road leading to peace, and people need to be taught to respect that law. Yet one does not arrive at the end of this road unless justice is complemented by love. Justice and love sometimes appear to be *opposing forces*. In fact, they are but *two faces of a single reality*" (n. 10). There is no doubt that the different religions, particularly Christianity and Islam, each in its own province, still have a long way to go to establish a true dialogue with one another, respectful and fruitful, in order to denounce any manipulation of religion to serve violence, and to convince men and women and especially political leaders to engage in new perspectives to build brotherhood and a just and lasting peace for everyone. I am delighted, therefore, by your Country's engagement to establish a sincere dialogue between the cultures and the religions. This is an important goal which must lead to relations that show greater solidarity between human and religious communities. For its part, the modest Catholic community that lives in Tunisia has no other ambition than to witness to the dignity of man, created in the image of God, and to put itself in a brotherly way at his service. May I be permitted, Mr Ambassador, to greet through you its Pastor, the Bishop of Tunis, and all the Catholic faithful there. They are particularly involved not only in the field of education but also in health care. They have put and wish to continue to put their hearts into the development of the Country through their work and are eager to pursue an open and loyal dialogue of life with Muslim believers. I encourage them to grow in mutual love, to show themselves welcoming to their brethren who come from other Churches, thereby witnessing to their sense of brotherhood and their love for peace. At the time when you are inaugurating your noble mission at the service of peace and good relations between your Country and the Holy See, I would like to assure you, Mr Ambassador, of my cordial good wishes and the support of my co-workers. You will always be welcome at the Vatican where you will find in them the help you may need. I invoke upon you, your family and all your Embassy staff an abundance of divine Blessings.

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