

APOSTOLIC JOURNEY TO THE PHILIPPINES,
PAPUA NEW GUINEA, AUSTRALIA AND SRI LANKA

WELCOMING CEREMONY

ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS JOHN PAUL II

*"Jackson International Airport" of Port Moresby
Monday, 16 January 1995*

*Your Excellency the Governor-General,
Mr Prime Minister,
My Brother Bishops,
Dear People of Papua New Guinea,*

1. For me it is a great joy to return to this beautiful country of Papua New Guinea. I am most grateful for your warm welcome. I have looked forward to this visit to experience again the lively Christian faith of your people and to see at first hand the progress of your Nation. Your Excellency the Governor-General, I thank you for your kind words. To all of you who have come here to greet me with such hospitality I express my heartfelt thanks. I am indebted to my Brother Bishops and to everyone who has worked to make this visit possible: may God abundantly bless you all!

2. My visit has a twofold character. I come to my Catholic brothers and sisters in this young nation *as the Successor of Saint Peter*, to whom the Lord entrusted a special ministry of safeguarding the apostolic faith and of preserving the unity of God's People in love. It is my desire and purpose to strengthen the Christian faithful of this country as they bear witness to Jesus Christ, and to encourage them to remain ever steadfast in the Gospel which they received through the preaching of the missionaries. At the same time, I come to all the people of Papua New Guinea, Christian and non-Christian alike, *as a friend and a brother*, on a pilgrimage of solidarity and good will, and with profound respect for every one of you.

3. As you are aware, the central event of my visit is the *Beatification of Peter To Rot, catechist and martyr*. You can be truly proud of your Melanesian brother; he has brought distinction and honour to your people. Peter To Rot is an outstanding example of a family man, a Church leader and a person prepared to lay down his life for God and neighbour.

I regret that I am not able to be with Peter To Rot's beloved Tolai people on this occasion, but circumstances have not permitted me to go to *New Britain*. I wish I could visit all the people in the various parts of these Islands, but I can only stay very briefly. Therefore I assure all of you, wherever you are, that I am thinking of you. I am especially aware of the whole country's concern for the suffering people of *Bougainville*. To you, people of Bougainville, I send a special word of encouragement. If you have been treated unjustly, I invite you to remove bitterness from your hearts. If you bear arms unjustly, I urge you to put them down and seek reconciliation. To the refugees in the Gazelle Peninsula, the Southern Highlands and other parts of Papua New Guinea I extend a warm greeting. I urge you to take heart, be courageous. Although I cannot come to you, I am close to you in your difficulties and I assure you of my fervent prayers.

4. In its Constitution, Papua New Guinea declares itself to be a Christian country, openly professing its belief in Jesus Christ. During the time of my Pastoral Visit, then, let us pray together, so as to strengthen our faith in Christ the Redeemer. To all of you who look to Jesus as Lord I

pray that you will open your hearts to one another, come together in prayer and work joyfully for unity.

May all the people who live in this land strive to build a society in which the dignity and rights of each individual will be respected by everyone. In this great task the Catholic Church will continue to do her part, in accordance with her religious nature and mission, and will generously co-operate with all sectors of the population.

[*The Pope greets those present in Pidgin*].

(Dear People of Papua New Guinea: My presence in your country is an expression of my great affection for this Nation and for each one of you. God bless Papua New Guinea! God bless you all!)