

APOSTOLIC JOURNEY
OF THE HOLY FATHER BENEDICT XVI
TO CAMEROON AND ANGOLA
(MARCH 17-23, 2009)

WELCOME CEREMONY

ADDRESS OF THE HOLY FATHER BENEDICT XVI

*4 de Fevereiro International Airport of Luanda
Friday, 20 March 2009*

*Mr President,
Distinguished Civil and Military Authorities,
Dear Brother Bishops,
Dear Angolan Friends,*

With sincere sentiments of respect and friendship, I set foot on the soil of this noble and young nation in the course of a pastoral visit in which I intend to reach out to the entire African continent, even if it has been necessary to restrict the itinerary to Yaoundé and to Luanda. I would like everyone to know, however, that I keep very much in my heart and in my prayers Africa in general and the people of Angola in particular, whom I warmly encourage to continue along the path of peace-building and reconstruction of the country and its institutions.

Mr President, I begin by thanking you for your kind invitation to visit Angola and for the warm words of welcome that you have just addressed to me. Please accept my respectful greetings and my very best wishes, which I also extend to the other Authorities who have kindly come here to receive me. I greet the whole of the Catholic Church in Angola in the persons of the Bishops here present, and I thank all my Angolan friends for the affectionate welcome they have given me. To those who are listening on radio and television, I offer a further cordial greeting, certain of Heaven's blessing on the common mission that has been entrusted to us: that of building together a freer and more peaceful society, marked by greater solidarity.

How can I fail to recall the famous visitor who blessed [Angola in June 1992](#): my beloved Predecessor [John Paul II](#)? A tireless missionary of Jesus Christ to the furthest ends of the earth, he pointed out the way towards God, inviting all people of good will to listen to their own rightly formed consciences and to build a society of justice, of peace and of solidarity, in mutual charity and forgiveness. For my part, I remind you that I come from a country where peace and fraternity are dear to the hearts of all its people, in particular those, like myself, who have known war and division between family members from the same nation as a result of inhuman and destructive ideologies, which, under the false appearance of dreams and illusions, caused the yoke of oppression to weigh down upon

the people. You can therefore understand how keenly aware I am of dialogue as a way of overcoming every form of conflict and tension and making every nation – including your own – into a house of peace and fraternity. With this in view, you must take from your spiritual and cultural heritage the best values that Angola possesses, and go out to meet one another fearlessly, agreeing to share personal resources, both spiritual and material, for the good of all.

How can our thoughts not turn also to the people from the province of Kunene, who have been afflicted by torrential rains and floods, causing numerous deaths and leaving many families without shelter through the destruction of their homes? At this time I would like to offer those people the assurance of my solidarity, together with a particular encouragement to have the confidence to start again with the help of all.

Dear Angolans, your land is abundant and your nation is mighty. Make use of these advantages to build peace and understanding between peoples, based upon loyalty and equality that can promote for Africa the peaceful future in solidarity that everyone longs for and to which everyone is entitled. To this end, I ask you: do not yield to the law of the strongest! God has enabled human beings to fly, over and above their natural tendencies, on the wings of reason and faith. If you let these wings bear you aloft, you will easily recognize your neighbour as a brother or sister, born with the same fundamental human rights. Unfortunately, within the borders of Angola, there are still many poor people demanding that their rights be respected. The multitude of Angolans who live below the threshold of absolute poverty must not be forgotten. Do not disappoint their expectations!

This is a huge task, requiring greater civic participation on everyone's part. It is necessary to involve the whole of Angolan civil society in this effort; but society needs to grow stronger and more articulated, both among its constitutive elements and in its dialogue with the Government, before it can take up the challenge. Before there can be a society that is truly solicitous for the common good, there have to be common values, shared by all. I am convinced that modern Angola will be able to find such values in the Gospel of Jesus Christ, as happened long ago, at the time of your illustrious forebear, Dom Alphonsus I Mbemba-a-Nzinga. Through his efforts, five hundred years ago, a Christian kingdom emerged in Mbanza Congo which survived until the eighteenth century. From its ashes, at the turn of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, a renewed Church could arise which has continued to grow right up to our own days; may God be thanked for it! This is the immediate occasion for my visit to Angola: to be together with one of the oldest Catholic communities in sub-equatorial Africa, to strengthen it in its faith in the risen Jesus and to join its sons and daughters in praying that this time of peace in Angola, in justice and fraternity, may prove lasting, allowing the community to carry out the mission that God has entrusted to it for the good of its people within the family of Nations. May God bless Angola!