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LE LETTERE CREDENZIALI DELL'AMBASCIATORE DELLE FILIPPINE PRESSO LA SANTA SEDE

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Alle ore 11 di questa mattina, il Santo Padre Benedetto XVI ha ricevuto in Udienza S.E. la Signora Mercedes Arrastia Tuason, Ambasciatore delle Filippine presso la Santa Sede, in occasione della presentazione delle Lettere Credenziali.

Pubblichiamo di seguito il discorso del Papa al nuovo ambasciatore, nonché i cenni biografici essenziali di S.E. la Signora Mercedes Arrastia Tuason:

• DISCORSO DEL SANTO PADRE

Madam Ambassador,

Grateful for the kind words which you have addressed to me, I gladly accept the Letters of Credence accrediting you as Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of the Republic of the Philippines to the Holy See. I would like to reciprocate the warm greetings which you have extended to me on behalf of Her Excellency, President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo, and I would ask you to convey to her and to all the beloved Filipino people the assurance of my spiritual closeness and prayers, especially for the victims of Typhoon Ketsana.

For over half a century, the Holy See and the Philippines have maintained excellent diplomatic relations, strengthening their long-standing cooperation for the promotion of peace, human dignity and freedom. The spirit of good will which has brought us to this day will surely enkindle a fresh desire to work together so that justice and freedom go hand-in-hand, and that democratic principles be grounded in truth. For her part, in the midst of the many changing social, economic and political conditions around the globe, the Church continues to hold out the Gospel as the path to authentic human progress (cf. *Spe Salvi*, 23). I am confident that the faith of the Filipino people – a faith, as Your Excellency has indicated, which gives them the "resilience" to face any hardship or difficulty – will arouse in them a desire to participate ever more fervently in the worldwide task of building up a civilization of love, the seed of which God has implanted in every people and every culture.

Your Excellency, I am pleased to note the various development initiatives under way in your country, including

the modernization of irrigation systems, the improvement of public transportation and the reform of social assistance programs. As the Philippines continues to implement these and other plans for a just and sustainable development, I am confident that she will draw upon all her resources – spiritual as well as material – so that her citizens may flourish in body and soul, knowing the goodness of God and living in solidarity with their neighbors. Such programs, of course, are primarily aimed at improving the actual living conditions of the poorest, thus enabling them to fulfill their responsibilities towards their families and to carry out the duties which fall to them as members of the wider community. Above all, the struggle against poverty calls for honesty, integrity and an unwavering fidelity to the principles of justice, especially on the part of those directly entrusted with the offices of governance and public administration.

In an age when the name of God is abused by certain groups, the "work of charity" (*Caritas in Veritate*, 57) is particularly urgent. This is especially true in regions that have been sadly scarred by conflicts. I encourage all to persevere so that peace may prevail. As you have mentioned, Madam Ambassador, initiatives that aim at facilitating dialogue and cultural exchange are particularly effective, for peace can never come about merely as the product of a technical process engineered through legislative, judicial or economic means. In the conviction that evil is only conquered with good (cf. *Rom* 12:21), many in your country are taking courageous steps to bring people together in order to foster reconciliation and mutual understanding. I am thinking in particular of the commendable work of the *Bishops Ulama Conference (BUC)*, the *Mindanao People's Conference*, as well as that of many grassroots organizations. The *Special Non-Aligned Movement Ministerial Meeting on Interfaith Dialogue and Cooperation for Peace and Development*, which your country will host in December, also holds out the promise of advancing peace in Mindanao and throughout the world.

In closing, Madam Ambassador, I would like to take this opportunity to reassure the Filipino people of my affection and continued prayers for them. I encourage them to allow their deep faith, their cultural heritage and the democratic values that have been a part of their patrimony from the time of their independence to shine as an example to all.

Extending a cordial welcome to you and to your distinguished family, I offer you my best wishes that your stay in Rome may be pleasant, and that the important mission entrusted to you may consolidate relations between the Holy See and the Republic of the Philippines, to the benefit of all. Through the intercession of Our Lady of Truth, Justice and Holiness, may God bless the efforts of the authorities and citizens, so that your nation may walk the way of authentic human progress in an atmosphere of harmony and peace.

**S.E. la Signora Mercedes Arrastia Tuason,
Ambasciatore delle Filippine presso la Santa Sede**

È nata a Lubao, Pampanga, il 27 settembre 1930.

È vedova. Ha sei figli.

È laureata in Scienze della Nutrizione (*St. Scholastica College*, 1953).

Ha svolto le seguenti attività: Membro del Consiglio Pastorale della Parrocchia-Santuario de San Antonio; Dirigente della Croce Rossa (1987-1993); Membro del Consiglio di Amministrazione della *Tuason Community Center Foundation* (1992-1995); dal 1986: Membro della Bigay Puso Foundation; dal 1989: Membro del Consiglio di Amministrazione del Center for Peace, Asia; dal 1990: Membro del Consiglio di Amministrazione della Hero Foundation; dal 1991: Membro della *Pro-Life Foundation Inc.*; dal 1991: Membro del Consiglio di Amministrazione della Evelio Javier Foundation; dal 1994: Tesoriere della *Family Values Foundation* delle Filippine; dal 1997: Membro della *Mission Angels*; dal 2000: Membro del Consiglio di Amministrazione della Our Lady of Mercy Halfway House Inc.; dal 2002: Membro del Consiglio della *Mission Society* delle Filippine; dal 2007 è anche Vice-Presidente del Consiglio di Amministrazione della Crociata per il Rosario delle Famiglie.

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