



The Holy See

***ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI
TO REPRESENTATIVES OF THE HOLY SEE
TO INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS AND
TO PARTICIPANTS IN THE FORUM OF CATHOLIC-INSPIRED
NON-GOVERNMENTAL ORGANIZATIONS****

*Clementine Hall
Saturday, 1st December 2007*

*Your Excellencies,
Representatives of the Holy See to International Organizations,
Dear Friends,*

I am pleased to greet all of you who are assembled in Rome to reflect on the contribution which Catholic-inspired Non-governmental Organizations can offer, in close collaboration with the Holy See, to the solution of the many problems and challenges associated with the various activities of the United Nations and other international and regional organizations. To each of you I offer a cordial welcome. In a particular way I thank the Substitute of the Secretariat of State, who has graciously interpreted your common sentiments, while at the same time informing me of the goals of your Forum. I also greet the young representative of the Non-governmental Organizations present.

Taking part in this important meeting are representatives of groups long associated with the presence and activity of the Catholic laity at the international level, along with members of other, more recent groups which have come into being as part of the current process of global integration. Also present are groups mainly committed to advocacy, and others chiefly concerned with the concrete management of cooperative projects promoting development. Some of your organizations are recognized by the Church as public and private associations of the lay faithful, others share in the charism of certain institutes of consecrated life, while still others enjoy only civil recognition and include non-Catholics and non-Christians among their members. All of you,

however, have in common a passion for promoting human dignity. This same passion has constantly inspired the activity of the Holy See in the international community. The real reason for the present meeting, then, is to express gratitude and appreciation for what you are doing in active collaboration with the papal representatives to international organizations. In addition, this meeting seeks to foster a spirit of cooperation among your organizations and consequently the effectiveness of your common activity on behalf of the integral good of the human person and of all humanity.

This unity of purpose can only be achieved through a variety of roles and activities. The multilateral diplomacy of the Holy See, for the most part, strives to reaffirm the great fundamental principles of international life, since the Church's specific contribution consists in helping "to form consciences in political life and to stimulate greater insight into the authentic requirements of justice as well as greater readiness to act accordingly" (*Deus Caritas Est*, 28). On the other hand, "the direct duty to work for a just ordering of society is proper to the lay faithful" – and in the context of international life this includes Christian diplomats and members of Non-governmental Organizations – who "are called to take part in public life in a personal capacity" and "to configure social life correctly, respecting its legitimate autonomy and cooperating with other citizens according to their respective competences and fulfilling their own responsibility" (*ibid.*, 29).

International cooperation between governments, which was already emerging at the end of the nineteenth century and which grew steadily throughout the last century despite the tragic disruption of two world wars, has significantly contributed towards the creation of a more just international order. In this regard, we can look with satisfaction to achievements such as the universal recognition of the juridical and political primacy of human rights, the adoption of shared goals regarding the full enjoyment of economic and social rights by all the earth's inhabitants, the efforts being made to develop a just global economy and, more recently, the protection of the environment and the promotion of intercultural dialogue.

At the same time, international discussions often seem marked by a relativistic logic which would consider as the sole guarantee of peaceful coexistence between peoples a refusal to admit the truth about man and his dignity, to say nothing of the possibility of an ethics based on recognition of the natural moral law. This has led, in effect, to the imposition of a notion of law and politics which ultimately makes consensus between states – a consensus conditioned at times by short-term interests or manipulated by ideological pressure – the only real basis of international norms. The bitter fruits of this relativistic logic are sadly evident: we think, for example, of the attempt to consider as human rights the consequences of certain self-centred lifestyles; a lack of concern for the economic and social needs of the poorer nations; contempt for humanitarian law, and a selective defence of human rights. It is my hope that your study and reflection during these days will result in more effective ways of making the Church's social doctrine better known and accepted on the international level. I encourage you, then, to counter relativism creatively by presenting the great truths about man's innate dignity and the rights which are derived from that

dignity. This in turn will contribute to the forging of a more adequate response to the many issues being discussed today in the international forum. Above all, it will help to advance specific initiatives marked by a spirit of solidarity and freedom.

What is needed, in fact, is a spirit of solidarity conducive for promoting as a body those ethical principles which, by their very nature and their role as the basis of social life, remain non-negotiable. A spirit of solidarity imbued with a strong sense of fraternal love leads to a better appreciation of the initiatives of others and a deeper desire to cooperate with them. Thanks to this spirit, one will always, whenever it is useful or necessary, work in collaboration either with the various non-governmental organizations or the representatives of the Holy See, with due respect for their differences of nature, institutional ends and methods of operation. On the other hand, an authentic spirit of freedom, lived in solidarity, will help the initiative of the members of non-governmental organization to create a broad gamut of new approaches and solutions with regard to those temporal affairs which God has left to the free and responsible judgement of every individual. When experienced in solidarity, legitimate pluralism and diversity will lead not to division and competition, but to ever greater effectiveness. The activities of your organizations will bear genuine fruit provided they remain faithful to the Church's magisterium, anchored in communion with her pastors and above all with the successor of Peter, and meet in a spirit of prudent openness the challenges of the present moment.

Dear friends, I thank you once again for your presence today and for your dedicated efforts to advance the cause of justice and peace within the human family. Assuring you of a special remembrance in my prayers, I invoke upon you, and the organizations you represent, the maternal protection of Mary, Queen of the World. To you, your families and your associates, I cordially impart my Apostolic Blessing.

*AAS XCIX, p.1060-1063.

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