



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI
TO H.E. Mr. CHAIYONG SATJIPANON
NEW AMBASSADOR OF THE KINGDOM OF THAILAND
TO THE HOLY SEE***

*Clementine Hall
Thursday, 13 December 2007*

Your Excellency,

With much pleasure I welcome you to the Vatican and accept the Letters of Credence appointing you Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of the Kingdom of Thailand to the Holy See. I greatly appreciate the cordial greetings which you have brought from His Majesty King Bhumibol Adulyadej. I warmly reciprocate them and ask you to convey the assurance of my deep esteem for the Royal Family, and my prayers for the well-being of the citizens of your noble nation. The firm bonds of respect and friendship between Thailand and the Holy See, which enjoy a remarkable history of more than four hundred years, today remain a source of particular strength that both parties draw upon in their service to the human family.

On the auspicious occasion of the Sixtieth Anniversary of His Majesty's succession to the throne of the Kingdom of Thailand, I had the profound satisfaction of joining all the citizens of your country in recognizing the many blessings which His Majesty has received over these last six decades. I also took the opportunity to express my respect for the loving service he has rendered through his assiduous care to promote unity, religious tolerance and compassion for the poor. Indeed, for centuries the Royal Family and the Holy See have shared a concern and solicitude for the human family, especially the most vulnerable. The joyous Christmas visit of Princess Maha Chakri Sirindhorn to the Apostolic Nunciature, which included cultural activities and service to the poor, not only warmed the hearts of all present but manifested afresh our common commitment to the marginalized and less fortunate.

The moral characteristic of authentic development is of fundamental importance to integral progress (cf. *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*, 9). The right to meaningful work and an acceptable standard of living, the assurance of a fair distribution of goods and wealth, and the responsible use of natural resources all depend upon a concept of development which is not limited merely to satisfying material necessities. Instead, such a concept must also highlight the dignity of the human person – the proper subject of all progress – and thereby enhance the common good of all, including minority groups. While such a goal certainly demands the support of the international community, it is also the case that much can be achieved through regional and local initiatives. Your nation's efforts to promote economic cooperation between ASEAN member States affirm the profound value of communal solidarity. Indeed, economic and social cooperation have helped substantially to overcome historical divisions and animosities in the region. They have also helped to lessen the incidents of local unrest of the type which sporadically emerges in the south of your country.

As Your Excellency has kindly observed, the Church in Thailand serves the nation considerably through her extensive educational and social apostolate. In regard to the provision of education, we can take heart that where schools and training institutes function in a professional manner and are staffed by people of personal integrity with a love of learning, a hopeful future is offered to a nation and most especially to its young. Education is a highly effective means to break the cycle of poverty which still afflicts so many families today, and it is increasingly recognized by the international community as an indispensable part of the way to peace. By the learning and socialization gained through schooling, pupils from all strata of society are integrated into a nation's civic life and are thus able to have the satisfaction of contributing to it.

The Catholic Church, in her service of the human family, reaches out to all members of Thai society without distinction. Her charitable mission, particularly to the poor and suffering, bears witness to "the unbreakable bond between love of God and love of neighbour" (*Deus Caritas Est*, 16). Of particular concern to her is the scourge of AIDS, prostitution and the trafficking of women and children which continue to afflict the countries of the region. Undoubtedly poverty is a major factor underlying this phenomenon and one which the Church constantly addresses. It must also be acknowledged that the decline in moral values, fuelled by the trivialization of sexuality in the media and entertainment industries, leads to the degradation of women and even the abuse of children. The complexity of this unspeakable human exploitation demands a concerted international response. To this end, I note Thailand's increasing commitment to various international conventions and protocols designed to combat sexual exploitation and trafficking. This international cooperation, coupled with an unbending domestic political resolve to confront the corruption and impunity which facilitate such crimes, will lead to a turning point of hope and dignity for all concerned. In these efforts I can assure you of the Church's utmost moral support and practical assistance.

Over the past year, Thailand has made significant strides towards revitalizing its democratic

institutions. I join the people of your country as they look forward to a full restoration of the structures and procedures that will help relieve social tensions and respect the political rights of minorities. I take this opportunity to encourage a fair and just electoral process in the weeks ahead which favours the participation of all and honours the voice of the people.

Mr Ambassador, I am confident that the mission which you begin today will help to strengthen still further the bonds of understanding between Thailand and the Holy See. As you take up your new responsibilities I assure you that the various offices of the Roman Curia are ready to assist you in the fulfillment of your duties. Upon yourself and your fellow citizens I invoke an abundance of divine blessings.

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