



The Holy See

***ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS POPE BENEDICT XVI
TO THE DIPLOMATIC CORPS ACCREDITED TO THE HOLY SEE
FOR THE TRADITIONAL EXCHANGE OF NEW YEAR GREETINGS*Monday, 8 January 2007***

*Your Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,*

I am pleased to welcome you here today, for this traditional ceremony in which we exchange greetings. Although it is an annual event, it is by no means a mere formality; rather, it is an opportunity to strengthen our hope and to deepen our commitment to serve the cause of peace and the development of individuals and peoples.

Firstly, I should like to thank the Dean, Ambassador Giovanni Galassi, for the kind words that he has addressed to me on your behalf. I also extend a particular greeting to the Ambassadors who are present at this meeting for the first time. To all of you I offer my most cordial good wishes and I assure you of my prayers that the year 2007 will bring happiness and peace to you and your families, to your staff and to all peoples and their leaders.

At the start of the year, we are invited to turn our attention to the international situation, so as to focus upon the challenges that we are called to address together.

Among the key issues, how can we not think of the millions of people, especially women and children, who lack water, food, or shelter? The worsening scandal of hunger is unacceptable in a world which has the resources, the knowledge, and the means available to bring it to an end. It impels us to change our way of life, it reminds us of the urgent need to eliminate the structural causes of global economic dysfunction and to correct models of growth that seem incapable of guaranteeing respect for the environment and for integral human development, both now and in the future. Once again I invite the leaders of the wealthiest nations to take the necessary steps to ensure that poor countries, which often have a wealth of natural resources, are able to benefit from the fruits of goods that are rightfully theirs. From this point of view, the delay in implementing the commitments undertaken by the international community during the last few years is another cause of concern. So it is to be hoped that the trade negotiations of the “Doha Development Round” of the World Trade Organization will be resumed, and that the process of debt cancellation

and reduction for the poorest countries will be continued and accelerated. At the same time, these processes must not be made conditional upon structural adjustments that are detrimental to the most vulnerable populations.

Equally, in the area of disarmament, symptoms of a developing crisis are multiplying, linked to difficulties in negotiations over conventional weapons and weapons of mass destruction and also to the rise in global military expenditure. Security issues – aggravated by terrorism, which is to be utterly condemned – must be approached from a global and far-sighted perspective.

As far as humanitarian crises are concerned, we should note that the organizations dealing with them need greater support, so that they can be equipped to provide protection and assistance to the victims. Another concern which looms ever larger is that of the movement of persons: millions of men and women are forced to leave their homes or their native lands because of violence or in order to seek more dignified living conditions. It is an illusion to think that migration can be blocked or checked simply by force. Migration and the problems to which it gives rise must be addressed humanely, with justice and compassion.

How can we not be alarmed, moreover, by the continuous attacks on life, from conception to natural death? Such attacks do not even spare regions with a traditional culture of respecting life, such as Africa, where there is an attempt to trivialize abortion surreptitiously, both through the Maputo Protocol and through the Plan of Action adopted by the Health Ministers of the African Union – shortly to be submitted to the Summit of Heads of State and Heads of Government. Equally, there are mounting threats to the natural composition of the family based on the marriage of a man and a woman, and attempts to relativize it by giving it the same status as other radically different forms of union. All this offends and helps to destabilize the family by concealing its specific nature and its unique social role. Other forms of attack on life are sometimes committed in the name of scientific research. There is a growing conviction that research is subject only to the laws that it chooses for itself and that it is limited only by its own possibilities. This is the case, for example, in attempts to legitimize human cloning for supposedly therapeutic ends.

This overview of matters of concern must not distract our attention from the positive elements characteristic of the modern age. I should like to mention first of all the growing awareness of the importance of dialogue between cultures and between religions. This is a vital necessity, particularly in view of the challenges we all face regarding the family and society. I want to draw attention, moreover, to numerous initiatives in this area aimed at building common foundations for harmonious co-existence.

It is also timely to note the growing awareness shown by the international community of the enormous challenges of our time, and the efforts made to transform this awareness into concrete action. Within the United Nations Organization, the Council for Human Rights was established last year, and it is to be hoped that this will focus its activity on defence and promotion of the

fundamental rights of the person, especially the right to life and the right to religious freedom. Speaking of the United Nations, I feel I must mention with gratitude His Excellency Mr Kofi Annan for the work accomplished during his time in office as Secretary-General. I also express my best wishes for his successor, Mr Ban Ki-moon, who has recently assumed his new responsibilities.

Within the framework of development, various initiatives have been undertaken to which the Holy See has not failed to pledge its support, at the same time reiterating that these projects must not supplant the commitment of developed countries to devote 0.7% of their gross domestic product to international aid. Another important element in the collective struggle to eliminate poverty, in addition to aid – which one can only hope will expand – is a greater awareness of the need to combat corruption and to promote good governance. We must also encourage and continue the efforts that have been made to guarantee human rights to individuals and peoples, for the sake of more effective protection of civilian populations.

In considering the political situation in the various continents, we find even more reasons for concern and reasons for hope. At the outset, we note that peace is often fragile and even mocked. We cannot forget the African Continent. The drama of Darfur continues and is being extended to the border regions of Chad and the Central African Republic. The international community has seemed powerless for almost four years, despite initiatives intended to bring relief to the populations in distress and to arrive at a political solution. Only by active cooperation between the United Nations, the African Union, the governments and other interested parties will these methods achieve results. I invite all those concerned to act with determination: we cannot accept that so many innocent people continue to suffer and die in this way.

The situation in the Horn of Africa has recently become more serious, with the resumption of hostilities and the internationalization of the conflict. While calling upon all parties to lay down their arms and to enter negotiations, I should like to invoke the memory of Sister Leonella Sgorbati, who gave her life in the service of the least fortunate, and prayed that her murderers be forgiven. May her example and her witness inspire all those who truly seek the good of Somalia.

With regard to Uganda, we must pray for the progress of negotiations between the parties, in order to hasten the end of that cruel conflict which has even seen numerous children enlisted and forced to become soldiers. This would allow the many displaced persons to return home and to resume a dignified way of life. The contribution of religious leaders and the recent appointment of a Representative of the Secretary-General of the United Nations augur well. I repeat: we must not forget Africa with its numerous situations of war and tension. We must remember that only negotiations between the various protagonists can open the way to a just settlement of the conflicts and offer a glimpse of progress towards the establishment of lasting peace.

The Great Lakes Region has seen much bloodshed over the years through merciless wars. Recent positive developments are to be welcomed with interest and hope, especially the

conclusion of the period of political transition in Burundi and, more recently, in the Democratic Republic of Congo. Yet it is urgent that these countries commit themselves to restoring the proper functioning of the rule of law, in order to disarm the warlords and allow society to develop. In Rwanda, I pray that the long process of national reconciliation after the genocide may finally result in justice, but also in truth and forgiveness. The International Conference on the Great Lakes Region, with the participation of a delegation from the Holy See and representatives of numerous national and regional Episcopal conferences of Central and Eastern Africa, affords a glimpse of new hopes. Finally, I should like to mention the Ivory Coast, urging the embattled parties to create a climate of mutual trust that can lead to disarmament and peace. And I should like to speak of Southern Africa: in the countries of this region, millions of people are reduced to a situation of great vulnerability that clamours for the attention and the support of the international community.

Among the positive signs for Africa is the wish expressed by the international community to keep its attention focused on this continent. Likewise, the strengthening of Africa's continental and regional institutions bears witness to the desire of the countries concerned to take increasing charge of their own destiny. Moreover, we must pay tribute to the laudable attitude of the people who commit themselves with determination every day, on the ground, to promote projects which contribute to the development and the organization of economic and social life.

The apostolic journey that I shall undertake next May to Brazil gives me the opportunity to turn my attention towards that great country, which awaits me with joy, and towards the whole of Latin America and the Caribbean. The improvement in certain economic indicators, the commitment to combat drug-trafficking and corruption, the various processes of integration, the efforts to improve access to education, to fight unemployment and to reduce inequalities in the distribution of revenues – these are all signs to be viewed with satisfaction. If these developments are consolidated, they will be able to make a decisive contribution to overcoming the poverty that afflicts vast sectors of the population and to increasing the stability of institutions. In the light of the elections that took place last year in several countries, it should be emphasized that democracy is called to take into account the aspirations of the citizens as a whole, and to promote increasing respect for all the components of society, according to the principles of solidarity, subsidiarity and justice. Yet the practice of democracy must not be allowed to turn into the dictatorship of relativism, by proposing anthropological models incompatible with the nature and dignity of the human person.

My attention is focused in a special way on certain individual countries – notably Colombia, where the long internal conflict has provoked a humanitarian crisis, especially as far as displaced persons are concerned. Every effort must be made to bring peace to the country, to return to families their loved ones who have been kidnapped, to restore security and normal life for millions of people. Such signs will give confidence to everyone, including those who have been implicated in the armed struggle. Our attention is also turned towards Cuba. In voicing the hope that all of its inhabitants may realize their legitimate aspirations, amid concern for the common good, I should

like to renew the appeal made by my venerable Predecessor: "Let Cuba open itself to the world, and let the world open itself to Cuba." Mutual openness to other countries can only bring benefits to all concerned. Not far away, the people of Haiti continue to live in great poverty surrounded by violence. I pray that the interest of the international community – manifested among other things by the conferences of donors that took place in 2006 – will lead to the consolidation of institutions and will allow the people to become the architects of their own development, amid a climate of reconciliation and harmony.

The Asian continent includes countries characterized by very large populations and significant economic development. I am thinking of China and India, countries that are in rapid expansion, and I hope that their growing presence on the international stage will bring with it benefits for their own populations and for other nations. Likewise, I pray for Vietnam, recalling its recent entry into the World Trade Organization. My thoughts go out to the Christian communities. In most Asian countries, they tend to be small but lively communities, with a legitimate desire to be able to live and act in a climate of religious liberty. This is not only a primordial right but it is a condition that will enable them to contribute to the material and spiritual progress of society, and to be sources of cohesion and harmony.

In East Timor, the Catholic Church intends to continue making her contribution, notably in the fields of education, healthcare and national reconciliation. The political crisis experienced by this young State, and by other countries in the region, highlights a certain fragility in the processes of democratization. Dangerous sources of tension are lurking in the Korean Peninsula. The goal of reconciling the Korean people and maintaining the Peninsula as a nuclear-free zone – which will bring benefits to the entire region – must be pursued within the context of negotiations. It is important to avoid gestures that could compromise the talks, and likewise to avoid making their results a condition for the humanitarian aid destined for the most vulnerable sectors of the North Korean population.

I would like to draw your attention to two other Asian countries that give cause for concern. In Afghanistan, in recent months, we can only deplore the notable increase in violence and terrorist attacks. This has rendered the way out of the crisis more difficult, and it weighs heavily on the local population. In Sri Lanka, the failure of the Geneva negotiations between the Government and the Tamil Movement has brought with it an intensification of the conflict, causing great suffering among the civilian population. Only the path of dialogue can ensure a better and safer future for all.

The Middle East is also a source of great anxiety. For this reason I decided to write a [Christmas letter to the Catholics of the region](#), expressing my solidarity and spiritual closeness to them all, and encouraging them to remain in the region, as I am sure that their witness will be of assistance and support for a future of peace and fraternity. I renew my urgent appeal to all parties involved in the complex political chessboard of the region, hoping for a consolidation of the positive signs

noted in recent weeks between Israelis and Palestinians. The Holy See will never tire of reiterating that armed solutions achieve nothing, as we saw in Lebanon last summer. In fact, the future of that country depends upon the unity of all its components, and upon fraternal relations between its different religious and social groupings. This would constitute a message of hope for all. It is no longer possible to be satisfied with partial or unilateral solutions. In order to put an end to the crisis and to the sufferings it causes among the population, a global approach is needed, which excludes no one from the search for a negotiated settlement, taking into account the legitimate interests and aspirations of the different peoples involved. In particular, the Lebanese have a right to see the integrity and sovereignty of their country respected; the Israelis have a right to live in peace in their State; the Palestinians have a right to a free and sovereign homeland. When each of the peoples in the region sees that its expectations are taken into consideration and thus feels less threatened, then mutual trust will be strengthened. This trust will grow if a country like Iran, especially in relation to its nuclear programme, agrees to give a satisfactory response to the legitimate concerns of the international community. Steps taken in this direction surely help to stabilize the whole region, especially Iraq, putting an end to the appalling violence which disfigures that country with bloodshed, and offering an opportunity to work for reconstruction and reconciliation between all its inhabitants.

Closer to us, in Europe, two new countries, Bulgaria and Romania, nations with a long Christian tradition, have joined the European Union. As the celebration of the fiftieth anniversary of the Treaty of Rome approaches, some reflection on the Constitutional Treaty would seem appropriate. I hope that the fundamental values that are at the basis of human dignity will be fully protected, particularly religious freedom in all its dimensions and the institutional rights of Churches. Likewise, one cannot ignore the undeniable Christian heritage of the continent, which has greatly contributed to the formation of European nations and European peoples. The fiftieth anniversary of the rising of Budapest, celebrated last October, calls to mind the dramatic events of the twentieth century, and it prompts all Europeans to build a future free from oppression and from ideological conditioning, to establish bonds of friendship and fraternity, and to show concern and solidarity towards the poor and the weak. Likewise, the tensions of the past must be purified by promoting reconciliation at all levels, since this alone opens the way to the future and gives hope. I also appeal to all those on European soil who are tempted by terrorism, to cease from all such activity: actions of this kind only lead to more violence and create fear among populations – they are simply a dead end. And I must also mention the various “frozen conflicts” and today’s recurring tensions linked to energy resources, in the hope that they will find a rapid and definitive solution.

I pray that the Balkan region will arrive at the stability so ardently desired, particularly through the integration of the nations concerned into continental structures with the support of the international community. The establishment of diplomatic relations with the Republic of Montenegro, which has recently entered peacefully into the family of nations, and the Fundamental Accord signed with Bosnia-Herzegovina are signs of the Holy See’s constant concern for the Balkan region. As the moment approaches in which the statute of Kosovo will be defined, the Holy See asks all

concerned to strive with far-sighted wisdom, flexibility and moderation, so that a solution may be found which respects the rights and legitimate expectations of all.

The situations I have mentioned constitute a challenge that touches us all – a challenge to promote and consolidate all the positive elements in the world, and to overcome, with good will, wisdom and tenacity, all that causes injury, degradation and death. It is by respecting the human person that peace can be promoted, and it is by building peace that the foundations of an authentic integral humanism are laid. This is where I find the answer to the concern for the future voiced by so many of our contemporaries. Yes, the future can be serene if we work together for humanity. Man, created in the image of God, has an incomparable dignity; man, who is so worthy of love in the eyes of his Creator that God did not hesitate to give his own Son for him. That is the great mystery of Christmas, which we have just celebrated, and which continues to spread its joyful atmosphere over our meeting today. In her commitment to serve humanity and to build peace, the Church stands alongside all people of good will and she offers impartial cooperation. Together, each in his place and with his respective gifts, let us work to build an integral humanism which alone can guarantee a world of peace, justice and solidarity. In expressing this hope, I also pray to the Lord for all of you, for your families, for your staff, and for the peoples that you represent.

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