



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI
TO H.E. Mr ALPO RUSI
NEW AMBASSADOR OF THE REPUBLIC OF FINLAND
TO THE HOLY SEE***

*Clementine Hall
Thursday, 17 December 2009*

Mr Ambassador,

I am pleased to welcome you to the Vatican and to accept the Letters accrediting you as Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of the Republic of Finland to the Holy See. I thank you for your gracious words and for the greetings that you bring from your President, Her Excellency Ms Tarja Halonen. Please convey to her my own good wishes and assure her of my continuing prayers for the well-being and prosperity of all the citizens of your land.

For over sixty years, as you have observed, the Holy See has enjoyed cordial diplomatic relations with Finland, and indeed there are many common objectives in international affairs on which we can continue to work together. Your nation has shown a commitment to building up harmonious relations within Europe, particularly among the Member States of the European Union. Finland's border with Russia enables it to act as a bridge to that country, and its proximity to the Baltic States means that it is well placed to foster cooperation and mutual exchange between them and the Nordic lands. The Holy See is eager to lend support to initiatives that encourage fraternity between nations while recognizing that, of themselves, the technical aspects of cooperation and stable coexistence are not enough to create lasting friendship between peoples or to overcome every division. It depends, rather, on charity, a divine gift which both presupposes and transcends justice in human relations (cf. *Caritas in Veritate*, [19](#), [34](#)). This is where the voice of the Church has an essential contribution to make to international affairs, as nations like your own have recognized, ever since diplomatic relations were established between us during the dark days of the Second World War.

For many years Finland has been at the forefront of international diplomatic activity in defence of peace and human rights. Indeed the very name of your capital, Helsinki, is associated with this worthy goal in the minds of countless people. Your nation has contributed actively to peace-keeping operations and has recently held with distinction the Presidency of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, an agency that owes its origin in 1975 to the Helsinki Final Act, another fruit of your country's active presence on the international stage.

In this connection, the Holy See particularly appreciates the initiatives that your Government has taken recently to strengthen its links with African nations. I spoke last October at the launch of the Second Special Assembly for Africa of the Synod of Bishops about the great spiritual contribution that the peoples of that continent can make to a world which in so many ways is undergoing a crisis of faith and hope (cf. *Homily*, 4 October 2009). While on the one hand economic aid and technology transfer should be granted in justice to the African people, they, with their great vitality and love of life, have much to teach the rest of the world. In this context, your country's commitment to development sets an example of how to "steer the globalization of humanity in relational terms, in terms of communion and the sharing of goods" (*Caritas in Veritate*, 42).

The Finns have a distinguished track record in humanitarian aid, and their support for peoples less fortunate than themselves is likewise manifested in the welcome extended to immigrants. This is an area where the Church is able to assist, since the harmonious integration of foreigners into their host countries is greatly facilitated if they can find a spiritual home there, and Catholic communities, especially when small in number, are always very conscious of their communion with fellow Catholics throughout the world. The happy occasion last September of the ordination of a native Finn as Catholic Bishop of Helsinki is a sign both of the ancient roots of the Finnish Catholic Church and of its growth in recent years. In this context, I am also pleased to note the increasing cooperation and dialogue between the different Christian communities in Finland. I thank Your Excellency for the greetings that you bring from the Lutheran and Orthodox Archbishops, and I ask you kindly to reciprocate. These signs of growing fraternity among the followers of Christ augur well for the development of mutual understanding and respect between newly arrived immigrants of various religions and their Finnish hosts.

A vital contribution that all religious groups can offer in your country, as elsewhere in Europe, is to draw attention to certain values that are in danger of being eroded through the process of secularization. I understand the pressures that governments face when presented with insistent demands from some quarters, in the name of tolerance, for acceptance of an ever wider range of viewpoints and lifestyles, but, as I have often pointed out, the virtue of tolerance is not served by the sacrifice of truth, particularly the truth concerning the dignity of the human person. I urge your Government to continue to take note of the ethical perspectives based upon the natural law indelibly inscribed in our common humanity – those authentically human values to which you have just referred – so that Finland's long-standing esteem for the family and respect for life may shape its response to delicate social issues with long-term implications for the health of any human

society.

In offering my best wishes for the success of your mission, I would like to assure you that the various departments of the Roman Curia are ready to provide help and support in the fulfilment of your duties. Upon Your Excellency and all the people of Finland I cordially invoke God's abundant blessings.

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