



The Holy See

PILGRIMAGE
OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI
TO THE HOLY LAND
(8-15 MAY 2009)

FAREWELL CEREMONY

ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI*

Courtyard of the Presidential Palace - Bethlehem
Wednesday, 13 May 2009

Mr President,
Dear Friends,

I thank you for the great kindness you have shown me throughout this day that I have spent in your company, here in the Palestinian Territories. I am grateful to the President, Mr Mahmoud Abbas, for his hospitality and his gracious words. It was deeply moving for me to listen also to the testimonies of the residents who have spoken to us about the conditions of life here on the West Bank and in Gaza. I assure all of you that I hold you in my heart and I long to see peace and reconciliation throughout these tormented lands.

It has truly been a most memorable day. Since arriving in Bethlehem this morning, I have had the joy of celebrating Mass together with a great multitude of the faithful in the place where Jesus Christ, light of the nations and hope of the world, was born. I have seen the care taken of today's infants in the Caritas Baby Hospital. With anguish, I have witnessed the situation of refugees who, like the Holy Family, have had to flee their homes. And I have seen, adjoining the camp and overshadowing much of Bethlehem, the wall that intrudes into your territories, separating neighbors and dividing families.

Although walls can easily be built we all know that they do not last for ever. They can be taken down. First, though, it is necessary to remove the walls that we build around our hearts, the barriers that we set up against our neighbors. That is why, in my parting words, I want to make a renewed plea for openness and generosity of spirit, for an end to intolerance and exclusion. No matter how intractable and deeply entrenched a conflict may appear to be, there are always grounds to hope that it can be resolved, that the patient and persevering efforts of those who work for peace and reconciliation will bear fruit in the end. My earnest wish for you, the people of Palestine, is that this will happen soon, and that you will at last be able to enjoy the peace, freedom and stability that have eluded you for so long.

Be assured that I will continue to take every opportunity to urge those involved in peace negotiations to work towards a just solution that respects the legitimate aspirations of Israelis and Palestinians alike. As an important step in this direction, the Holy See looks forward to establishing shortly, in conjunction with the Palestinian Authority, the Bilateral Permanent Working Commission that was envisioned in the Basic Agreement, signed in the Vatican on 15 February 2000 (cf. *Basic Agreement between the Holy See and the Palestine Liberation Organization*, art. 9).

Mr President, dear friends, I thank you once again and I commend all of you to the protection of the Almighty. May God look down in love upon each one of you, upon your families and all who are dear to you. And may he bless the Palestinian people with peace.

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