



The Holy See

***ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI
TO H.E. Mr. HABBEH MOHAMMED RADI ALI AL-SADR,
THE NEW AMBASSADOR OF THE REPUBLIC OF IRAQ
TO THE HOLY SEE****

Friday, 2 July 2010

Your Excellency,

I am pleased to welcome you at the start of your mission and to accept the Letters accrediting you as Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of the Republic of Iraq to the Holy See. I thank you for your kind words, and I ask you to convey to President Jalal Talabani my respectful greetings and the assurance of my prayers for the peace and well-being of all the citizens of your country.

On 7 March 2010, the people of Iraq gave a clear sign to the world that they wish to see an end to violence and that they have chosen the path of democracy, through which they aspire to live in harmony with one another within a just, pluralist and inclusive society. Despite attempts at intimidation on the part of those who do not share this vision, the people showed great courage and determination by presenting themselves at the polling stations in large numbers. It is to be hoped that the formation of a new Government will now proceed swiftly so that the will of the people for a more stable and unified Iraq may be accomplished. Those who have been elected to political office will need to show great courage and determination themselves, in order to fulfil the high expectations that have been placed in them. You may be assured that the Holy See, which has always valued its excellent diplomatic relations with your country, will continue to provide whatever assistance it can, so that Iraq may assume its rightful place as a leading nation in the region with much to contribute to the international community.

The new Government will need to give priority to measures designed to improve security for all sectors of the population, particularly the various minorities. You have spoken of the difficulties

faced by Christians and I note your comments about the steps taken by the Government to afford them greater protection. The Holy See naturally shares the concern you have expressed that Iraqi Christians should remain in their ancestral homeland, and that those who have felt constrained to emigrate will soon consider it safe to return. Since the earliest days of the Church, Christians have been present in the land of Abraham, a land which is part of the common patrimony of Judaism, Christianity and Islam. It is greatly to be hoped that Iraqi society in the future will be marked by peaceful coexistence, as is in keeping with the aspirations of those who are rooted in the faith of Abraham. Although Christians form a small minority of Iraq's population, they have a valuable contribution to make to its reconstruction and economic recovery through their educational and healthcare apostolates, while their engagement in humanitarian projects provides much-needed assistance in building up society. If they are to play their full part, however, Iraqi Christians need to know that it is safe for them to remain in or return to their homes, and they need assurances that their properties will be restored to them and their rights upheld.

Recent years have seen many tragic acts of violence committed against innocent members of the population, both Muslim and Christian, acts which as you have pointed out are contrary to the teachings of Islam as well as those of Christianity. This shared suffering can provide a deep bond, strengthening the determination of Muslims and Christians alike to work for peace and reconciliation. History has shown that some of the most powerful incentives to overcome division come from the example of those men and women who, having chosen the courageous path of non-violent witness to higher values, have lost their lives through cowardly acts of violence. Long after the present troubles have receded into the past, the names of Archbishop Paulos Faraj Rahho, Father Ragheed Ganni and many more will live on as shining examples of the love that led them to lay down their lives for others. May their sacrifice, and the sacrifice of so many others like them, strengthen within the Iraqi people the moral determination that is necessary if political structures for greater justice and stability are to achieve their intended effect.

You have spoken of your Government's commitment to respect human rights. Indeed, it is of the utmost importance for any healthy society that the human dignity of each of its citizens be respected both in law and in practice, in other words that the fundamental rights of all should be recognized, protected and promoted. Only thus can the common good be truly served, that is to say those social conditions which allow people, either as groups or as individuals, to flourish, to attain their full stature, and to contribute to the good of others (cf. *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*, 164-170). Among the rights that must be fully respected if the common good is to be effectively promoted, the rights to freedom of religion and freedom of worship are paramount, since it is they that enable citizens to live in conformity with their transcendent dignity as persons made in the image of their divine Creator. I therefore hope and pray that these rights will not only be enshrined in legislation, but will come to permeate the very fabric of society – all Iraqis have a part to play in building a just, moral and peaceable environment.

You begin your term of office, Mr Ambassador, in the months leading up to a particular initiative of

the Holy See for the support of the local Churches throughout the region, namely the Special Assembly for the Middle East of the Synod of Bishops. This will provide a welcome opportunity to explore the role and the witness of Christians in the lands of the Bible, and will also give an impetus to the important task of inter-religious dialogue, which has so much to contribute to the goal of peaceful coexistence in mutual respect and esteem among the followers of different religions. It is my earnest hope that Iraq will emerge from the difficult experiences of the past decade as a model of tolerance and cooperation among Muslims, Christians and others in the service of those most in need.

Your Excellency, I pray that the diplomatic mission that you begin today will further strengthen the bonds of friendship between the Holy See and your country. I assure you that the various departments of the Roman Curia are always ready to offer help and support in the fulfilment of your duties. With my sincere good wishes, I invoke upon you, your family, and all the people of the Republic of Iraq, abundant divine blessings.

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