



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI
TO H.E. Mr HUSSAN EDIN AALA
NEW AMBASSADOR OF THE SYRIAN ARAB REPUBLIC
TO THE HOLY SEE**

Clementine Hall

Thursday, 9 June 2011

Mr Ambassador,

I receive you with pleasure this morning as you present the Letters accrediting you as Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of the Syrian Arab Republic to the Holy See. You have kindly wished to convey to me the greetings of His Excellency, the President of the Republic, and I would be grateful if you would thank him on my behalf. Through you I likewise wish to greet all the Syrian people, expressing the desire that it may live in peace and brotherhood.

As you emphasized, Mr Ambassador, Syria has been an important and beloved place for Christians from the time of the Church's origin. Since Paul, who was to become the Apostle to the Gentiles, encountered the Risen Christ on the road to Damascus, a wealth of great saints has spangled the religious history of your country. Equally abundant is the archaeological evidence of churches, monasteries and mosaics, dating back to the early centuries of the Christian era, which binds us to the Church's origins. Syria has traditionally been an example of tolerance, conviviality and harmonious relations between Christians and Muslims and today their ecumenical and interreligious relations are good. I warmly hope that this friendly coexistence of all cultural and religious members of the nation will continue to develop for the greatest good of all, thereby reinforcing a unity founded on justice and solidarity.

However, the construction of this unity can only be permanent if the centrality and dignity of the human person is recognized. Indeed, "As one created in the image of God, each individual human being has the dignity of a person; he or she is not just something, but someone capable of self-knowledge, self-possession, free self-giving and entering into communion with others" (*Message*

for the World Day of Peace 2007, n. 2). The path of unity and stability for each nation therefore moves through the recognition of the inalienable dignity of every human person. The person must therefore be at the centre of the institutions, laws and actions of societies. Consequently, it is also essential to give priority to the common good, setting aside personal or partisan interests. Moreover, the process of listening, dialogue and collaboration must be recognized as the means through which the various members of society may compare their points of view and thus achieve a consensus on the truth of particular values or aims. Great advantages will result from this for individuals and for communities (cf. *Discourse to the United Nations*, 18 April 2008).

In this perspective, the events that have occurred in recent months in which some countries surrounding the Mediterranean — including Syria — demonstrated the desire for a better future in the areas of economy, justice, freedom and participation in public life. These events also show the urgent need for real reforms in the country's political, economic and social life. It is nevertheless highly desirable that these developments do not take place through intolerance, discrimination or conflict, and even less through violence, but rather through absolute respect for truth, for coexistence, for the legitimate rights of individuals and groups, as well as for reconciliation. Such principles must guide leaders while taking account the aspirations of civil society as well as of the international authorities.

Mr Ambassador, I would like to emphasize here the positive role Christians have in your country; as citizens, they are engaged in the building of a society where all may find their place. I cannot fail to mention the Catholic Church's service in the social and educational sectors, which is appreciated by everyone. May I be permitted to offer a very special greeting to the faithful of the Catholic communities, with their bishops, and to encourage them to nourish the bonds of brotherhood with everyone. Daily relations with their Muslim compatriots shed light on the importance of interreligious dialogue and on the possibility of working together — in many ways — for the common good. May the impetus given by the recent *Special Assembly for the Middle East of the Synod of Bishops* yield abundant fruit in your country, for the benefit of the entire population, and an authentic reconciliation among peoples!

A global solution must be found, if peace is to make headway in the region. It must not be harmful to the interests of any of the parties involved and must be the result of a compromise and not of unilateral decisions imposed by force. Force resolves nothing, it merely provides partial or unilateral solutions which are inadequate. Aware of the suffering of all the populations, it is necessary to proceed with a deliberately global approach that excludes no one from the quest for a negotiated solution which takes into account the aspiration and legitimate interests of the various people involved. In this manner the situation that the Middle East has been experiencing for years has led you to welcome a large number of refugees, mainly from Iraq, and among them many Christians. I warmly thank the Syrian people for their generosity.

As you embark on your noble mission as representative to the Holy See, I address to you, Mr

Ambassador, my best wishes for the success of your mission. You may be sure that you will always find with my co-workers the welcome and understanding you may need. I wholeheartedly invoke upon you, Your Excellency, upon your family and upon all the inhabitants of Syria an abundance of divine blessings.