



The Holy See

***ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS POPE BENEDICT XVI
TO THE MEMBERS OF THE DIPLOMATIC CORPS
ACCREDITED TO THE HOLY SEE***

Sala Regia

Monday, 9 January 2012

[Video]

*Your Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,*

It is always a particular pleasure for me to receive you, the distinguished members of the Diplomatic Corps accredited to the Holy See, in the splendid setting of this Sala Regia, and personally to offer you my cordial good wishes for the New Year. Before all else, I thank your Dean, Ambassador Alejandro Valladares Lanza, and the Vice-Dean, Ambassador Jean-Claude Michel, for the respectful sentiments which they expressed on your behalf, and I offer a special greeting to all those taking part in our meeting for the first time. Through you my good wishes extend to all the nations which you represent and with which the Holy See maintains diplomatic relations. It is a joy for us that Malaysia joined this community in the past year. The dialogue which you maintain with the Holy See favours the exchange of views and information, as well as cooperation in areas of common interest which are bilateral or multilateral in nature. Your presence today evokes the important contribution which the Church makes to your societies in areas such as education, health care and social services. A sign of the cooperation existing between the Catholic Church and States is seen in the Accords reached in 2011 with Azerbaijan, Montenegro and Mozambique. The first has already been ratified; I trust that this will also be the case with the two others, and that those currently under negotiation will soon be concluded. The Holy See also desires to establish a fruitful dialogue with international and regional organizations, and in this context I note with satisfaction that the member states of the Association of South-East Asian Nations (ASEAN) have accepted the appointment of an Apostolic Nuncio accredited to that

organization. Nor can I fail to mention that last December the Holy See strengthened its longstanding cooperation with the International Organization for Migration by becoming a full member. This is a sign of the commitment of the Holy See and the Catholic Church, alongside the international community, in the search for suitable solutions to this phenomenon which presents a number of aspects ranging from the safeguarding of the dignity of persons to concern for the common good of both the communities which receive them and those from which they come.

In the course of the year just ended, I personally met many Heads of State and Government, as well as the distinguished representatives of your nations who took part in the [ceremony of the Beatification of my beloved predecessor, Pope John Paul II](#). Representatives of your countries were also graciously present for the celebrations marking the [sixtieth anniversary of my priestly ordination](#). To all of them, and to those whom I met during my Apostolic Journeys to [Croatia](#), [San Marino](#), [Spain](#), [Germany](#) and [Benin](#), I renew my gratitude for the kindness which they showed me. My thoughts also turn in a special way to the countries of Latin America and the Caribbean which in 2011 celebrated the bicentenary of their independence. On 12 December last, they emphasized their bond with the Catholic Church and with the Successor of the Prince of the Apostles by taking part, alongside distinguished representatives of the ecclesial community and institutional authorities, in the [solemn celebration held in Saint Peter's Basilica](#), during which I announced my intention to visit Mexico and Cuba in the near future. Finally, I wish to greet South Sudan, which last July became a sovereign state. I am happy that this was achieved peacefully. Sadly, tensions and clashes have ensued in recent months, and I express my hope that all may unite their efforts to enable the people of Sudan and South Sudan to experience at last a period of peace, freedom and development.

Your Excellencies,

Today's meeting traditionally takes place at the end of the [Christmas season](#), during which the Church celebrates the coming of the Saviour. He comes in the dark of night and so his presence is immediately a source of light and joy (cf. *Lk 2:9-10*). Truly the world is gloomy wherever it is not brightened by God's light! Truly the world is dark wherever men and women no longer acknowledge their bond with the Creator and thereby endanger their relation to other creatures and to creation itself. The present moment is sadly marked by a profound disquiet and the various crises – economic, political and social – are a dramatic expression of this.

Here I cannot fail to address before all else the grave and disturbing developments of the global economic and financial crisis. The crisis has not only affected families and businesses in the more economically advanced countries where it originated, creating a situation in which many people, especially the young, have felt disoriented and frustrated in their aspirations for a serene future, but it has also had a profound impact on the life of developing countries. We must not lose heart, but instead resolutely rediscover our way through new forms of commitment. The crisis can and must be an incentive to reflect on human existence and on the importance of its ethical dimension,

even before we consider the mechanisms governing economic life: not only in an effort to stem private losses or to shore up national economies, but to give ourselves new rules which ensure that all can lead a dignified life and develop their abilities for the benefit of the community as a whole.

I would like next to point out that the effects of the present moment of uncertainty are felt particularly by the young. Their disquiet has given rise in recent months to agitation which has affected various regions, at times severely. I think first and foremost of North Africa and the Middle East, where young people, among others, who are suffering from poverty and unemployment and are fearful of an uncertain future, have launched what has developed into a vast movement calling for reforms and a more active share in political and social life. At present it is hard to make a definitive assessment of recent events and to understand fully their consequences for the stability of the region. Initial optimism has yielded to an acknowledgment of the difficulties of this moment of transition and change, and it seems evident to me that the best way to move forward is through the recognition of the inalienable dignity of each human person and of his or her fundamental rights. Respect for the person must be at the centre of institutions and laws; it must lead to the end of all violence and forestall the risk that due concern for popular demands and the need for social solidarity turn into mere means for maintaining or seizing power. I invite the international community to dialogue with the actors in the current processes, in a way respectful of peoples and in the realization that the building of stable and reconciled societies, opposed to every form of unjust discrimination, particularly religious discrimination, represents a much vaster horizon than that of short-term electoral gains. I am deeply concerned for the people of those countries where hostilities and acts of violence continue, particularly Syria, where I pray for a rapid end to the bloodshed and the beginning of a fruitful dialogue between the political forces, encouraged by the presence of independent observers. In the Holy Land, where tensions between Palestinians and Israelis affect the stability of the entire Middle East, it is necessary that the leaders of these two peoples adopt courageous and farsighted decisions in favour of peace. I was pleased to learn that, following an initiative of the Kingdom of Jordan, dialogue has been resumed; I express my hope that it will be maintained, and that it will lead to a lasting peace which guarantees the right of the two peoples to dwell in security in sovereign states and within secure and internationally recognized borders. For its part, the international community must become more creative in developing initiatives which promote this peace process and are respectful of the rights of both parties. I am also following closely the developments in Iraq, and I deplore the attacks that have recently caused so much loss of life; I encourage the nation's leaders to advance firmly on the path to full national reconciliation.

Blessed [John Paul II](#) stated that “the path of peace is at the same time the path of the young”,^[1] inasmuch as young people embody “the youth of the nations and societies, the youth of every family and of all humanity”.^[2] Young people thus impel us to take seriously their demand for truth, justice and peace. For this reason, I chose them as the subject of [my annual World Day of Peace Message](#), entitled *Educating Young People in Justice and Peace*. Education is a crucial theme for

every generation, for it determines the healthy development of each person and the future of all society. It thus represents a task of primary importance in this difficult and demanding time. In addition to a clear goal, that of leading young people to a full knowledge of reality and thus of truth, education needs *settings*. Among these, pride of place goes to the *family*, based on the marriage of a man and a woman. This is not a simple social convention, but rather the fundamental cell of every society. Consequently, policies which undermine the family threaten human dignity and the future of humanity itself. The family unit is fundamental for the educational process and for the development both of individuals and States; hence there is a need for policies which promote the family and aid social cohesion and dialogue. It is in the family that we become open to the world and to life and, as I pointed out during [my visit to Croatia](#), “openness to life is a sign of openness to the future”.^[3] In this context of openness to life, I note with satisfaction the recent sentence of the Court of Justice of the European Union forbidding patenting processes relative to human embryonic stem cells, as well as the resolution of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe condemning prenatal selection on the basis of sex.

More generally, and with particular reference to the West, I am convinced that legislative measures which not only permit but at times even promote abortion for reasons of convenience or for questionable medical motives compromise the education of young people and, as a result, the future of humanity.

Continuing our reflection, a similarly essential role in the development of the person is played by *educational institutions*: these are the first instances which cooperate with the family and they can hardly function properly unless they share the same goals as the family. There is a need to implement educational policies which ensure that schooling is available to everyone and which, in addition to promoting the cognitive development of the individual, show concern for a balanced personal growth, including openness to the Transcendent. The Catholic Church has always been particularly active in the field of education and schooling, making a valued contribution alongside that of state institutions. It is my hope that this contribution will be acknowledged and prized also by the legislation of the various nations.

In this perspective, it is clear that an effective educational programme also calls for respect for *religious freedom*. This freedom has individual, collective and institutional dimensions. We are speaking of the first of human rights, for it expresses the most fundamental reality of the person. All too often, for various reasons, this right remains limited or is flouted. I cannot raise this subject without first paying tribute to the memory of the Pakistani Minister Shahbaz Bhatti, whose untiring battle for the rights of minorities ended in his tragic death. Sadly, we are not speaking of an isolated case. In many countries Christians are deprived of fundamental rights and sidelined from public life; in other countries they endure violent attacks against their churches and their homes. At times they are forced to leave the countries they have helped to build because of persistent tensions and policies which frequently relegate them to being second-class spectators of national life. In other parts of the world, we see policies aimed at marginalizing the role of religion in the life

of society, as if it were a cause of intolerance rather than a valued contribution to education in respect for human dignity, justice and peace. In the past year religiously motivated terrorism has also reaped numerous victims, especially in Asia and in Africa; for this reason, as I stated in Assisi, religious leaders need to repeat firmly and forcefully that “this is not the true nature of religion. It is the antithesis of religion and contributes to its destruction”.^[4] Religion cannot be employed as a pretext for setting aside the rules of justice and of law for the sake of the intended “good”. In this context I am proud to recall, as I did in my native country, that the Christian vision of man was the true inspiration for the framers of Germany’s Basic Law, as indeed it was for the founders of a united Europe. I would also like to bring up several encouraging signs in the area of religious freedom. I am referring to the legislative amendment whereby the public juridical personality of religious minorities was recognized in Georgia; I think too of the sentence of the European Court of Human Rights upholding the presence of the crucifix in Italian schoolrooms. It is also appropriate for me to make particular mention of Italy at the conclusion of the 150th anniversary of her political unification. Relations between the Holy See and Italy experienced moments of difficulty following the unification. In the course of time, however, concord and the mutual desire for cooperation, each within its proper domain, prevailed for the promotion of the common good. I hope that Italy will continue to foster a stable relationship between Church and State, and thus serve as an example to which other nations can look with respect and interest.

On the continent of Africa, to which I returned during [my recent visit to Benin](#), it is essential that cooperation between Christian communities and Governments favour progress along the path of justice, peace and reconciliation, where respect is shown for members of all ethnic groups and all religions. It is painful to realize that in different countries of the continent this goal remains distant. I think in particular of the renewed outbreak of violence in Nigeria, as we saw from the attacks against several churches during the Christmas period, the aftermath of the civil war in Côte d’Ivoire, the continuing instability in the Great Lakes region and the humanitarian emergency in the countries of the Horn of Africa. I once again appeal to the international community to make every effort to find a solution to the crisis which has gone on for years in Somalia.

Finally I would stress that education, correctly understood, cannot fail to foster *respect for creation*. We cannot disregard the grave natural calamities which in 2011 affected various regions of South-East Asia, or ecological disasters like that of the Fukushima nuclear plant in Japan. Environmental protection and the connection between fighting poverty and fighting climate change are important areas for the promotion of integral human development. For this reason, I hope that, pursuant to the XVII session of the Conference of States Parties to the UN Convention on Climate Change recently concluded in Durban, the international community will prepare for the UN Conference on Sustainable Development (“Rio + 20”) as an authentic “family of nations” and thus with a great sense of solidarity and responsibility towards present and future generations.

Your Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

The birth of the Prince of Peace teaches us that life does not end in a void, that its destiny is not decay but eternal life. Christ came so that we might have life and have it in abundance (cf. *Jn* 10:10). “Only when the future is certain as a positive reality does it become possible to live the present as well”.^[5] Inspired by the certainty of faith, the Holy See continues to offer its proper contribution to the international community in accordance with the twofold desire clearly enunciated by the [Second Vatican Council](#), whose fiftieth anniversary takes place this year: to proclaim the lofty grandeur of our human calling and the presence within us of a divine seed, and to offer humanity sincere cooperation in building a sense of universal fraternity corresponding to this calling.^[6] In this spirit I renew to all of you, and to your families and your staff, my most cordial good wishes for the New Year.

Thank you for your attention.

[1] John Paul II, Apostolic Letter *Dilecti Amici* (31 March 1985), 15.

[2] *Ibid.*, 1.

[3] [Homily at the Mass for the National Day of Croatian Catholic Families, Zagreb](#) (5 June 2011).

[4] [Address for the Day of Reflection, Dialogue and Prayer for Peace and Justice in the World, Assisi](#) (27 October 2011).

[5] *Spe Salvi*, 2.

[6] Cf. *Gaudium et Spes*, 3.