



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI
TO PARTICIPANTS IN THE ASSEMBLY OF
THE "REUNION OF AID AGENCIES FOR THE ORIENTAL CHURCHES"(R.O.A.C.O.)**

*Clementine Hall
Thursday, 21 June 2012*

*Dear Cardinals, Your Beatitudes,
Venerable Brother Bishops and Priests,
Dear Members and friends of ROACO,*

I am very happy to welcome and greet you in this regular gathering. I extend greetings to the Cardinal Prefect of the Congregation for Eastern Churches and President of ROACO and I thank him for the kind words that he addressed to me. I also thank the Archbishop Secretary, the Under-Secretary, the other officials and all those present. I renew my gratitude to the institutions represented here, to the Churches from Europe and America that support them and to the many benefactors. I assure you of my prayers to the Lord, in the consoling certainty that he “loves a cheerful giver” (2 Cor 9:7).

Above all it is my hope that you will persevere in “that movement of charity which, by Papal mandate, the Congregation oversees, so that the Holy Land and other Eastern regions may receive material and spiritual support in an ordered and just way so as to meet the demands of their ordinary ecclesial life and other special needs” ([*Address to the Congregation for Eastern Churches*](#), 9 June 2007). In these words I expressed myself five years ago while visiting the Dicastery for Eastern Churches and I now wish to reiterate firmly that same exhortation so as to underline the urgent needs of the present moment.

The present economic and social situation, all the more sensitive on account of its global dimensions, continues to create problems in economically developed areas of the world, and, more seriously, spills over into less affluent regions, seriously compromising their present and their

future. The East, the motherland of ancient Christian traditions, is especially affected by this process, which engenders uncertainty and instability that also has an impact on the Church and in the ecumenical and interreligious fields. These factors tend to reopen the endemic wounds of history and they have a damaging effect on dialogue and peaceful cohabitation among peoples. They also weaken authentic respect for human rights, especially the right to personal and community religious freedom. This right should be guaranteed in its public profession, not only in terms of worship, but also in relation to the pastoral, educational, charitable and social activities that are indispensable for its effective exercise.

The representatives of the Holy Land, including the Apostolic Delegate Archbishop Antonio Franco, the Vicar of the Latin Patriarch of Jerusalem and Father Custodian, all regular participants in ROACO, are joined this year by the two Major Archbishops, His Beatitude Cardinal George Alencherry of the SyroMalabar Church of India and His Beatitude Sviatoslav Shevchuk of the Greek Catholic Church of Ukraine. Also present are the Apostolic Nuncio to Syria, Archbishop Mario Zenari, and the Bishop President of *Caritas* Syria. This gives me the opportunity to open up the gaze of the Church of Rome to the universal dimension that is so deeply rooted and constitutes one of the essential marks of the mystery of the Church. It also gives me the opportunity to reaffirm my closeness to the sufferings of our brothers and sisters in Syria, especially innocent children and the defenceless. May our prayer, our commitment and our active brotherhood in Christ, as an oil of consolation, help them not to lose sight of the light of hope in this moment of darkness, and obtain from God wisdom of heart for all in positions of responsibility so that bloodshed and violence, that only bring pain and death, may cease and give way to reconciliation, harmony and peace. Every effort should be made, including by the international community, to bring Syria out of the present situation of violence and crisis, which has already lasted a long time and risks becoming a wider conflict that would have highly negative consequences for the country and the whole region. I also issue an urgent and heartfelt appeal, in view of the extreme need of the population, that the necessary humanitarian assistance be guaranteed, and extended to the many persons who have been forced to leave their homes, some of them becoming refugees in neighbouring countries. The precious gift of human life must always be defended.

Dear friends of ROACO, the Year of Faith, which I have instituted to mark the fiftieth anniversary of the inauguration of the Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, will offer fruitful suggestions to Aid to the Eastern Churches, that are a providential witness to what we read in the Word of God: that faith without works withers and dies (cf. *Jas* 2:17). May you always be eloquent signs of the charity that flows from the heart of Christ and presents the Church to the world in her true mission and identity by placing her at the service of God who is Love. Today in the Latin Rite we celebrate Saint Aloysius Gonzaga, whom I ask to sustain our thanksgiving to the Holy Spirit and to pray with us so that the Lord may also raise up in our days exemplary agents of charity towards others. May the intercession of the Most Holy Mother of God always accompany the Eastern Churches in their homeland and in the diaspora, bringing them encouragement and hope for a renewed service to

the Gospel. May she also watch over the coming journey which – God willing – I will make to Lebanon for the solemn closing of the Special Assembly for the Middle East of the Synod of Bishops. I look forward to offering the Lebanese Church and Nation my paternal and fraternal embrace. In the meantime I am pleased to impart to your Organizations, to all present, to your dear ones, and to the communities entrusted to your care, my affectionate Apostolic Blessing.