



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI
TO H.E. Mr MUAMMER DOGAN AKDUR
AMBASSADOR OF TURKEY TO THE HOLY SEE***

Friday, 19 January 2007

Mr Ambassador,

I am pleased to welcome you, Your Excellency, on the occasion of the presentation of the Letters accrediting you as Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of the Republic of Turkey to the Holy See.

I thank you for the kind words you have conveyed to me from H.E. Mr Ahmet Necdet Sezer, President of the Republic. I would be grateful if you would kindly reciprocate by expressing to him my cordial good wishes for himself and for his compatriots.

On this occasion, I would like to express once again my gratitude to the Turkish Authorities and to the Turkish People for the welcome they offered me during my Pastoral Visit last December.

The unforgettable experience that led me to Ankara, Ephesus and Istanbul in the steps of my Predecessors, Paul VI and John Paul II, enabled me to ascertain the good relations established long ago between your Country and the Holy See.

In my various meetings with the political Authorities, I sought to reaffirm the implantation of the Catholic Church in Turkish society, due to the prestigious heritage of the first Christian communities in Asia Minor and the irreplaceable contribution to the life of the universal Church of the first Ecumenical Councils, but also to the existence of the Christian communities today. They are, of course, a minority, but are attached to their Country and to the common good of all society and desire to make their contribution to building the Nation.

While she enjoys the religious freedom that the Turkish Constitution guarantees to all believers,

the Catholic Church would like to be able to benefit from a recognized juridical status and to see an official dialogue established between the Bishops' Conference and the State Authorities, in order to settle the various problems that may arise and to pursue good relations between the two parties. I have no doubt that your Government will do everything in its power to advance in this direction.

During my memorable Visit, I frequently expressed the respect of the Catholic Church for Islam and the esteem of the Pope and the faithful for Muslim believers, especially during my Visit to Istanbul's Blue Mosque.

In the contemporary world, where tensions seem exacerbated, the conviction of the Holy See, which agrees with the one you have just expressed, is that the faithful of different religions must strive to work together for peace.

They must start by denouncing violence, all too often used in the past under the pretext of religious motivations, and by learning to know and respect one another better in order to build an increasingly fraternal society.

Religions can also join forces in acting to encourage respect for the human being, created in the image of the Almighty, and to make people recognize the acknowledged fundamental values that govern the life of people and of societies.

Dialogue, essential between religious Authorities at all levels, begins in daily life through the mutual respect and esteem that believers of every religion have for one another, sharing in the same life and working together for the common good.

As I recently recalled in Ankara, the Holy See recognizes Turkey's specific place and her geographic and historical situation as a bridge between the Continents of Asia and Europe, and a crossroads between cultures and religions.

It deeply appreciates your Country's commitment to peace in the international community, and especially its action for the resumption of negotiations in the Near East and its actual involvement in Lebanon, helping to rebuild the Country devastated by war and to enable a constructive dialogue to be initiated between all the constitutive parts of Lebanese society.

The Holy See always follows with close attention the discussions and efforts made by nations to settle among themselves, sometimes with the assistance of a third country and regional or international Authorities, situations of conflict inherited from the past, as well as practical actions to bring about a rapprochement of countries in political, cultural and economic associations or unions.

The globalization of exchanges, already manifest at the economic and financial levels, must of course be accompanied by common political engagements across the globe in order to guarantee a lasting and organized development that excludes no one and guarantees to individuals, families and peoples a balanced future.

Mr Ambassador, please allow me to greet through you the Catholic communities of Turkey, which I had the joy to visit, especially in Ephesus and Istanbul.

I repeat to the Bishops, the priests and all the faithful the affection of the Successor of Peter and his encouragement in order that the Catholic Church in Turkey may continue to witness humbly and faithfully to love of God through dialogue with everyone, especially Muslim believers, and through her involvement in the service to the common good.

I also greet with affection His Holiness Patriarch Bartholomew I, the Bishops and all the faithful of the Orthodox Church, with which so many ties of kinship already bind us as we await the blessed day when we will be invited to share in Christ's banquet.

Mr Ambassador, at the time when you are officially beginning your mission at the Holy See I offer you my very best wishes for its success. You may be sure that you will always find in my collaborators an attentive welcome and cordial understanding.

I wholeheartedly invoke an abundance of Blessings from the Almighty upon you, Your Excellency, upon your family and collaborators at the embassy, as well as upon the Turkish Authorities and People.

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