



## The Holy See

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**ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI  
TO H.E. Mr JUAN GÓMEZ MARTÍNEZ  
AMBASSADOR OF COLOMBIA TO THE HOLY SEE\***  
*Friday, 9 February 2007*

*Mr Ambassador,*

I am pleased to receive from your hands the Letters accrediting you as Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of the Republic of Colombia to the Holy See.

I offer you my most cordial welcome at this meeting at which you are beginning your mission. I thank you for the kind words you have addressed to me and for the respectful greeting that President Álvaro Uribe Vélez has wished to convey to me through you, as an expression of the spiritual closeness to the Pope of the Colombian People.

Your Excellency, you have come to represent to the Holy See a Nation which has been distinguished for its Catholic identity throughout its history.

Your words reminded me of the Colombians' deep affection for and filial devotion to the Successor of Peter, and enabled me to feel them once again. They are, as it were, the fruit of a deeply-rooted experience of the Christian faith that is also expressed in the faithful's appreciation of the Bishops and their fellow workers, who endeavour to keep alive the traditions and virtues inherited from their ancestors.

Your Country's important efforts for peace and reconciliation, together with its commitment to encouraging progress and more stable democratic institutions, have not passed unnoticed by the world.

The goals achieved for greater security and social stability, as well as in the fight against poverty, are praiseworthy. The constant concern in the area of education and the facilitation of access to

school and university courses for all citizens should also be highlighted, since education lays the foundations of a more human and supportive society.

Nevertheless, in your Country, as you have said, there continue to be complex situations in the political and social fields. I am aware of the challenges involved in a dialogue of peace, necessary despite the many difficulties that arise in the process.

In society, moreover, other problems persist that undermine the dignity of the person, the unity of the family, fair economic development and a proper standard of living.

Mindful of the achievements as well as of the problems, I encourage all Colombians to persevere in their efforts to reach a common accord and obtain the harmonious growth of the Nation. These aspirations can only be totally fulfilled when God is held to be the centre of human life and history.

I therefore appreciate, Your Excellency, the emphasis you placed on the Catholic Church's important work for national reconciliation.

Indeed, in addition to the direct participation of several Bishops, priests and Religious in peace-building initiatives, your voice has also been heard at decisive moments in Colombia's life, recalling the indispensable foundations of true human progress and peaceful coexistence and urging Catholics and people of good will to take the path of forgiveness and joint responsibility in order to establish justice.

As Pastor of the universal Church, I cannot refrain from expressing to Your Excellency my anxiety for the laws that concern those very sensitive issues such as the transmission and defence of life, sickness, the identity of the family and respect for marriage. On these topics and in the light of natural reason and the moral and spiritual principles that derive from the Gospel, the Catholic Church will continue ceaselessly to proclaim the inalienable greatness of human dignity.

It is also necessary to appeal to the responsibility of the lay people present in legislative bodies, in the Government and in the administration of justice to ensure that laws always express principles and values that are in conformity with natural law and that foster the authentic common good.

The beginning of your mission to the Holy See also affords me an opportunity to recall what I already said in the past in my Address to the Diplomatic Corps accredited to the Holy See.

In speaking of various countries, I mentioned "notably Colombia, where the long internal conflict has provoked a humanitarian crisis, especially as far as displaced persons are concerned. Every effort must be made to bring peace to the Country, to return to families their loved ones who have been kidnapped, to restore security and normal life to millions of people. Such signs will give confidence to everyone, including those who have been implicated in the armed struggle"

*(Address to the Diplomatic Corps Accredited to the Holy See, 8 January 2007; L'Osservatore Romano English edition, 17 January, p. 7).*

I ardently long for an end to the cruel scourge of kidnappings in your Country which represent a serious attack on people's dignity and rights. I accompany with my prayers all who are unjustly deprived of freedom and express my closeness to their families, confident that they will be released before long.

In this regard, the many institutions dedicated to charity, in line with the pastoral programmes of the Bishops' Conference and the Dioceses, are called to provide humanitarian aid to the neediest and especially to the displaced persons who are so numerous in Colombia, as well as to the victims of violence.

Thus, they also witness to the efforts of the Church, which is an artisan of communion and hope within the province of her own mission and in the circumstances of the Nation.

At the end of this meeting, I would like to express to you once again my desire that in your Homeland the deeply desired peace as well as reconciliation be reinforced. I ask God the Father to grant success to all efforts made to achieve this aim.

I also invoke the intercession of Our Lady of the Rosary of Chiquinquirá for the beloved Colombian People, for the President and the other Government Leaders, and especially for you, Your Excellency, and for your distinguished family, as I wish you great success in the fulfilment of the lofty mission that has been entrusted to you.

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