



# The Holy See

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**ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI  
TO H.E. MR ELCHIN OKTYABR OGLU AMIRBAYOV,  
AMBASSADOR OF THE REPUBLIC OF AZERBAIJAN  
TO THE HOLY SEE\***

*Thursday, 16 June 2005*

*Your Excellency,*

It is with particular pleasure that I welcome you to the Vatican as the first Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of the Republic of Azerbaijan to the Holy See. On this auspicious occasion I would ask you kindly to convey my cordial greetings to His Excellency President Aliev, and to the Government and people of your noble land. Assure them of my gratitude for their good wishes and of my prayers for the nation's peace and well-being.

The Church's diplomatic relations form a part of her mission of service to the international community. Her engagement with civil society is anchored in the conviction that the task of building a more just world must acknowledge and consider man's supernatural vocation. The Holy See strives therefore to promote an understanding of the human person who "receives from God his essential dignity and with it the capacity to transcend every social order so as to move towards truth and goodness" (Encyclical Letter *Centesimus Annus*, 38). From this foundation the Church applies the universal values which safeguard the dignity of every person and serve the common good to the vast array of cultures and nations that constitute our world.

The people of Azerbaijan know only too well that, if the spiritual dimension of persons is repressed or even denied, the soul of a nation is crushed. During the tragic epoch of intimidation in eastern European history, while the supremacy of force prevailed, the monotheistic faith communities present for centuries in your country preserved a hope for justice and freedom, a future in which the supremacy of truth would prevail. Today, they propose this anew. In fact, when my beloved predecessor [Pope John Paul II met last November with Religious Leaders of Azerbaijan](#)

representing the Muslim, Russian Orthodox and Jewish communities, he commented that the gathering was a symbol for the world of how tolerance between faith communities prepares the ground for a broader human, civil, and social development in greater solidarity.

As Azerbaijan continues to engage in the delicate task of forging its national character, it is to faith communities that political and civic authorities can turn for a determined commitment to shaping the social order in accordance with the common good. Such commitment demands that religious freedom, which preserves the singularity of each faith community, be sanctioned as a fundamental civil right and afforded protection by a robust framework of juridical norms which respect the laws and duties proper to religious communities (cf. Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Declaration on Religious Freedom *Dignitatis Humanae*, 2). Such practical support of religious freedom by political leaders becomes a sure means for authentic social progress and peace. In this regard, I acknowledge with thanks the role of President Aliiev and your Government in facilitating the reconstruction of the Catholic Church in Bakù together with the foundation of a home for the needy.

Mr Ambassador, sound economic development has been a long-standing aspiration of all Azerbaijan's citizens. It is also a right which carries the corresponding duty to contribute, according to one's ability, to the genuine progress of the community. The priority of promoting social and commercial projects capable of creating a more equitable society represents a difficult though stimulating challenge for all who regulate and work in the business sector.

Your country has already taken some steps towards ensuring the fundamental rights of its citizens and promoting democratic practices. Much, however, remains to be achieved. Only in respecting the inviolable dignity of the human person and promoting the corresponding individual liberties can a civil society be constructed which contributes to the prosperity of all its citizens. Be assured that the Catholic Church community, though few in number in Azerbaijan, will, for its part, continue to contribute selflessly to the promotion of justice and the protection of the poor.

Your Excellency, I am confident that the diplomatic mission which you begin today will further strengthen the already fruitful relations existing between the Holy See and your country. Please know that the various offices of the Roman Curia are ready to assist you in the fulfilment of your duties. With my sincere good wishes, I invoke upon you, your family and all the people of Azerbaijan, abundant divine blessings.

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\**L'Osservatore Romano. Weekly Edition in English* 17.6.2005 p.5.

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