



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI
TO H.E. Mr STEFÁN LÁRUS STEFÁNSSON
NEW AMBASSADOR OF ICELAND TO THE HOLY SEE***

*Consistory Hall
Friday, 1st June 2007*

Your Excellency,

It is with particular pleasure that I welcome you to the Vatican and accept the Letters of Credence by which you are appointed Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of Iceland to the Holy See. I would ask you kindly to convey to His Excellency President Ólafur Ragnar Grímsson, and to the government and people of your country my gratitude for their good wishes, which I warmly reciprocate, and to assure them of my prayers for the nation's spiritual well-being.

The Church's diplomatic relations form a part of her mission of service to the international community. This engagement with civil society is anchored in her conviction that the hope of building a more just world must acknowledge man's supernatural vocation. It is from God that men and women receive their essential dignity and with it the capacity and the call to direct their steps towards truth and goodness (cf. Encyclical Letter *Fides et Ratio*, 5). Within this broad perspective we can counter the pragmatic tendency, so prevalent today, which tends to engage only with the symptoms of social fragmentation and moral confusion. Where humanity's transcendent dimension is brought to light, individuals' hearts and minds are drawn to God and to the very essence of human life – truth, beauty, moral values, other persons, and being itself – (cf. *ibid.*, 83) leading them to a sure foundation and vision of hope for society.

As Your Excellency has observed, integral to Iceland's history is the Gospel of Jesus Christ including its missionary dimension. For over a thousand years Christianity has shaped Icelandic culture. In more recent times these spiritual roots have found a degree of resonance in your relations with Europe. This common cultural and moral identity, forged by the universal values of

Christianity, is not simply of historical importance. Being foundational, it can remain as a 'ferment' of civilization. In this regard, I commend your government's open recognition of Christianity's fundamental role in the life of your nation. When public moral discernment is not emptied of meaning by a secularism which neglects truth while highlighting mere opinion, both civil and religious leaders can uphold the absolute values and ideals inherent in the dignity of every person. In this way together they can offer our young people a future of happiness and fulfilment.

Iceland's significant contribution to the security and social development of the worldwide human family belies its size and the number of its citizens. Your nation's commitment to supporting peace-keeping operations and aid projects is readily recognized by the Holy See and esteemed by the international community. While your founder member status of NATO and your long history of United Nations Organization membership are well known, perhaps less known is the highly effective work of the Icelandic Crisis Response Unit. This well-respected service is an outstanding example, from the field of international relations, of men and women enlightened by the splendour of truth, setting out on the path of peace (cf. *Message for the 2006 World Day of Peace*, 3). Such initiatives aptly illustrate how the will to resolve conflicts peacefully and the determination to govern by justice, integrity, and service of the common good can be achieved.

Preservation of the environment and promotion of sustainable development are increasingly seen as matters of grave concern for all. As reflections and studies on ecology mature, it becomes more and more evident that there is an inseparable link between peace with creation, and peace among people. The full understanding of this relationship is found in the natural and moral order with which God has created man and has endowed the earth (cf. *Message for the 2007 World Day of Peace*, 8-9).

The close connection between these two ecologies comes into sharp focus when the questions of food resources and energy supply are addressed. The international community recognizes that the world's resources are limited. Yet the duty to implement policies to prevent the destruction of that natural capital is not always observed. Any irresponsible exploitation of the environment or hoarding of land or marine resources reflect an inhumane concept of development, the consequences of which affect the poorest countries most. Iceland, acutely aware of these matters, has rightly emphasized the relationship between the Millennium Development Goals and environment protection and the sustainable use of resources, and has laudably drawn attention to the fact that the large majority of those who make their living from fisheries are families in the developing world.

Mr Ambassador, the members of the Catholic Church in your country, though few, reach out to the entire Icelandic society. Expressing the Church's belief in the "unbreakable bond between love of God and love of neighbour" (*Deus Caritas Est*, 16), they undertake works of charity from their small but vibrant parish communities. A particularly beautiful example of this is found in the Carmelite convent of contemplative life in Hafnarfjörður, where the Sisters pray daily for the needs

of all Icelanders.

Your Excellency, I am confident that the mission which you begin today will help to strengthen even further the cordial bonds of understanding and cooperation between Iceland and the Holy See. Please rest assured that the various offices of the Roman Curia are ready to assist you in the fulfilment of your duties. Upon you, your family and your fellow citizens I invoke the abundant blessings of Almighty God.

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