



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI
TO H.E. Mrs AYESHA RIYAZ
NEW AMBASSADOR OF THE ISLAMIC REPUBLIC OF PAKISTAN*
TO THE HOLY SEE**

*Consistory Hall
Friday, 1st June 2007*

Your Excellency,

It gives me pleasure to welcome you to the Vatican as I accept the Letters of Credence by which you are appointed Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan to the Holy See. I would ask you to convey my greetings to His Excellency President Pervez Musharraf, and to the government and people of your nation. I am confident that the spirit of cooperation that has marked our diplomatic relations for over five decades will continue to promote the fundamental values which serve to uphold the inherent dignity of the human person. I would also ask you to extend affectionate greetings to the Catholic faithful in Pakistan and their Bishops and to assure them of my fervent prayers for their well-being.

You have rightly highlighted our common goal of fostering peace and justice in the world to secure a better future for mankind. This can only be accomplished when there is genuine cooperation between peoples, religions and nations. In this regard, the Holy See appreciates Pakistan's commitment to work together with the international community to bring greater stability to your region and to protect innocent lives from the threats of terrorism and violence. The road to national and international security is long and difficult. It takes great patience and resolve. Notwithstanding the obstacles encountered along the way, all efforts to keep open the pathway to peace, stability and hope should be encouraged and promoted.

The people of Pakistan know only too well the suffering caused by violence and lawlessness which, as Your Excellency correctly noted, lead to destabilization. The principles of democracy

assure the freedom to express political opinions publicly in a variety of ways. This right should always be exercised responsibly so that civil order is maintained and social harmony protected and fostered. I know your government is aware that the roots of political unrest and agitation within your borders must be addressed, and ways of sustaining civic and democratic institutions must be strengthened. In this way, national solidarity is enhanced, and peaceful ways of reconciling differences are encouraged.

One such step your country has taken in this direction is exemplified in your recent electoral reforms, which are aimed at facilitating the full participation of all citizens, including those belonging to minority groups. I would also like to acknowledge recent legislative decisions in Pakistan aimed at eliminating unjust forms of prejudice and discrimination against women. Pakistan has always placed a high value on education. Good schooling not only attends to the cognitive development of children, but the spiritual as well. Led by their teachers to discover the uniqueness of each human being as a creature of God, young people will come to recognize the dignity common to all men and women, including those belonging to cultures and religions different from their own. In this way, the civil life of a nation matures, making it possible for all citizens to enjoy the fruits of genuine tolerance and mutual respect.

A robust democratic society depends on its ability to uphold and protect religious freedom—a basic right inherent in the very dignity of the human person. It is therefore essential to safeguard citizens who belong to religious minorities from acts of violence. Such protection not only accords with human dignity but also contributes to the common good. During an era in which threats against religious freedom are becoming more ominous throughout the world, I encourage Pakistan to bolster its efforts in securing freedom for people to live, worship, and perform works of charity according to the dictates of their conscience and with immunity from intimidation. There is in fact an inseparable bond linking the love and worship of Almighty God with love and service toward one's neighbour (*Deus Caritas Est*, 16). Pakistan witnessed such charity in action in the aftermath of the tragic earthquake that struck your nation in 2005, when many organizations, including the Catholic Church, helped relieve the suffering of those affected by this natural disaster. The Catholic Church continues to play an important role in providing education, health care, and other charitable services to all your citizens, regardless of religious affiliation.

I wish to conclude by expressing my deep respect and admiration for the religious heritage that has inspired the human development of your country, and continues to animate its aspirations for greater peace and mutual understanding. Christians and Muslims both worship the One God, the Almighty, Creator of heaven and earth. It is this belief that moves us to unite minds and hearts as we work tirelessly for peace, justice, and a better future for mankind.

Be assured that the various departments of the Roman Curia stand ready to offer their services to help achieve these noble goals. As you carry out the duties entrusted to you, I extend to Your Excellency my sincere wish that your public service will bear much fruit. Upon you, your family and

your fellow citizens I cordially invoke the abundant blessings of Almighty God.

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