



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI
TO H.E. Mr. AMANZHOL ZHANKULIYEV
NEW AMBASSADOR OF KAZAKHSTAN TO THE HOLY SEE**

Clementine Hall
Thursday, 18 December 2008

Mr Ambassador,

I am pleased to receive Your Excellency at the Vatican for the presentation of the Letters accrediting you as Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of the Republic of Kazakhstan to the Holy See and I warmly thank you for conveying to me the courteous message from H.E. Mr Nursultan Nazarbayev, President of the Republic.

I would be grateful if you would kindly convey to him in return my best wishes for him, as well as for the civil and religious authorities and for the whole Kazakh people.

Kazakhstan occupies a geographical position that puts it in contact with important geopolitical entities: Europe, Russia, China and the countries with a Muslim majority. Its diversified population includes people with very different languages and cultural traditions. These two elements, combined with the natural riches that your country possesses, are a gift of God which it is necessary to manage well. This gift offers great possibilities and unfolds prospects that can concern the future of the human being and contribute to the affirmation of his dignity. Your President has wished to make your land a place for meeting and dialogue, a sort of laboratory in which one seeks to live a respectful coexistence of cultural and religious diversity, a space that can show other peoples and nations that it is possible for men to live in dignity, peace and respect for the belief and particular nature of each one. I could not sufficiently encourage all the initiatives taken both within your frontiers and outside them for interpersonal, intercultural and interreligious dialogue. The world is thirsting for peace and God desires it to grow and develop in harmony. In this regard, I acknowledge the courageous and open approaches of dialogue your country has

taken that will bear fruit within your own nation and consolidate stability in the region.

You know, Mr Ambassador, the positive role that religions can play in society, with respect for one another and collaborating to achieve common aims. It is certainly the State's role to guarantee full religious freedom but also to learn to respect the religious dimension and not to interfere in matters of faith or in the citizen's conscience. There is a great temptation for every State to leave the definition of the political and religious areas vague thus risking to fail to recognize what is outside its authority. Every State is consequently required to be watchful in order to avoid the negative effects of interference in the area of religion and its abuse as well as to respect the individual religious dimension which only asks to be simply and freely expressed without hindrance. Many are attentively observing Kazakhstan and its new approach in managing relations between religion and the State in order to learn from it. It is a unique opportunity offered to your country which should not be missed but willingly accepted. The Holy See supports all initiatives and activities to further peace and friendship among nations because they encourage mutual respect and human fulfilment.

Human nature, desired by God to be holy and noble, is not immune to defiance and the human heart is undermined by selfishness and falsity, as well as by his lack of inclination to solidarity and compassion. The various religious traditions that coexist in your nation will be able to suggest positive approaches in order to contribute successfully to its construction and development. They will not fail to help their faithful to conform to God's will and to work for the common good. Solidarity is essential in both interpersonal and interstate relations. Your country, on which the Most High has lavished human and natural riches, will be able to find the means to enable its own citizens and those nations which, less well endowed, still need various forms of assistance to benefit. The fair sharing of goods is becoming an imperative not only because it encourages political, national and international stability but because it responds to the divine will to create humankind as brothers and sisters to one another.

The Catholic community, which I ask you kindly to greet on my behalf, Mr Ambassador, has long been present in your country and has lived through many turbulent events in history. It has remained faithful, thanks to the self-denial of its priests, its men and women religious and thanks to the flame of faith that is still burning in believers' hearts (cf. *Ad limina visit of the Bishops of Central Asia, 2 October 2008*). These Catholic Kazakhs want to live their faith sincerely and to be able to continue to practise it serenely for their own personal perfection, of course, but also for the spiritual enrichment of your country through their own religious contribution. By its presence, its prayers and its actions the Catholic community participates in the stability and religious harmony of the noble Kazakhi society as a whole. The Agreement between the Holy See and the Republic of Kazakhstan, that was signed and came into being 10 years ago, guarantees the rights and duties of Catholics in your country and the rights and obligations of your State to them. As an epilogue to your address, Your Excellency, you described our bilateral relations as exemplary because, you said, they are based on "full reciprocal understanding and trust". You were right to

emphasize this and I gladly congratulate you. May God bless this mutual trust and strengthen it increasingly!

At the time when you are beginning your noble mission, Mr Ambassador, certain that you will always find an attentive welcome from my collaborators, I offer you my best wishes for its success and for the continuation and development of harmonious relations between the Holy See and the Republic of Kazakhstan. I invoke an abundance of divine Blessings upon you, Your Excellency, upon your family and upon all the Embassy staff, as well as upon the President of the Republic, upon the other leaders and upon all the inhabitants of your nation.

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