



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS POPE BENEDICT XVI
TO THE DIPLOMATIC CORPS ACCREDITED TO THE HOLY SEE
FOR THE TRADITIONAL EXCHANGE OF NEW YEAR GREETINGS****Monday, 7 January 2008 Your Excellencies,*

Ladies and Gentlemen, 1. I extend cordial greetings to your Dean, Ambassador Giovanni Galassi, and I thank him for the kind words that he has addressed to me in the name of the Diplomatic Corps accredited to the Holy See. To each of you I offer respectful greetings, particularly to those who are present at this meeting for the first time. Through you, I express my fervent prayers for the peoples and governments that you represent with such dignity and competence. Your community suffered a bereavement some weeks ago: the Ambassador of France, Monsieur Bernard Kessedjian, ended his earthly pilgrimage; may the Lord welcome him into his peace! My thoughts today go especially to the nations that have yet to establish diplomatic relations with the Holy See: they too have a place in the Pope's heart. The Church is profoundly convinced that humanity is a family, as I wanted to emphasize in [this year's World Day of Peace Message](#). 2. It was in a family spirit that diplomatic relations were established last year with the United Arab Emirates. In the same spirit, I was also able to visit certain countries that I hold dear. The enthusiastic welcome that I received from the Brazilians continues to warm my heart! In that country, [I had the joy of meeting the representatives of the great family of the Church in Latin America and the Caribbean, gathered at Aparecida for the Fifth General Conference of CELAM](#). In the economic and social sphere, I was able to note eloquent signs of hope for that continent, as well as certain reasons for concern. We all look forward to seeing increasing cooperation among the peoples of Latin America, and, within each of the countries that make up that continent, the resolution of internal conflicts, leading to a consensus on the great values inspired by the Gospel. [I wish to mention Cuba, which is preparing to celebrate the tenth anniversary of the visit of my venerable Predecessor, Pope John Paul II](#) was received with affection by the authorities and by the people, and he encouraged all Cubans to work together for a better future. I should like to reiterate this message of hope, which has lost none of its relevance. 3. My thoughts and prayers are directed especially towards the peoples affected by appalling natural disasters. I am thinking of the hurricanes and floods which have devastated certain regions of Mexico and Central America, as well as countries in Africa and Asia, especially Bangladesh, and parts of Oceania; mention must also be made of the great fires. [The Cardinal Secretary of State, who went to Peru at the end of August](#), brought me a first-hand account of the destruction and havoc caused by the terrible earthquake, but he spoke also of the courage and faith of the peoples affected. In the face of tragic events of this kind, a strong joint effort is needed. As I wrote in my [Encyclical on hope](#), "the true measure of humanity is essentially determined in relationship to suffering and to the sufferer. This holds true both for the individual and for society" (Encyclical Letter [Spe Salvi](#), 38). 4. The international community continues to be deeply concerned about the Middle East. I am glad that the Annapolis Conference pointed towards the abandonment of partisan or unilateral solutions, in favour of a global approach respectful of the rights and legitimate interests of all the

peoples of the region. I appeal once more to the Israelis and the Palestinians to concentrate their energies on the implementation of commitments made on that occasion, and to expedite the process that has happily been restarted. Moreover, I invite the international community to give strong support to these two peoples and to understand their respective sufferings and fears. Who can remain unmoved by the plight of Lebanon, amid its trials and all the violence that continues to shake that beloved country? It is my earnest wish that the Lebanese people will be able to decide freely on their future and I ask the Lord to enlighten them, beginning with the leaders of public life, so that, putting aside particular interests, they will be ready to pledge themselves to the path of dialogue and reconciliation. Only in this way will the country be able to progress in stability and to become once more an example of the peaceful coexistence of different communities. In Iraq too, reconciliation is urgently needed! At present, terrorist attacks, threats and violence continue, especially against the Christian community, and the news which arrived yesterday confirms our concern; it is clear that certain difficult political issues remain unresolved. In this context, an appropriate constitutional reform will need to safeguard the rights of minorities. Important humanitarian aid is necessary for the peoples affected by the war; I am thinking especially of displaced persons within the country and refugees who have fled abroad, among whom there are many Christians. I invite the international community to be generous towards them and towards their host countries, whose capacities to absorb them have been sorely tested. I should also like to express my support for continued and uninterrupted pursuit of the path of diplomacy in order to resolve the issue of Iran's nuclear programme, by negotiating in good faith, adopting measures designed to increase transparency and mutual trust, and always taking account of the authentic needs of peoples and the common good of the human family.⁵ Turning our gaze now towards the whole of Asia, I should like to draw your attention to some other crisis situations, first of all to Pakistan, which has suffered from serious violence in recent months. I hope that all political and social forces will commit themselves to building a peaceful society, respectful of the rights of all. In Afghanistan, in addition to violence, there are other serious social problems, such as the production of drugs; greater support should be given to efforts for development, and even more intensive work is required in order to build a serene future. In Sri Lanka it is no longer possible to postpone further the decisive efforts needed to remedy the immense sufferings caused by the continuing conflict. And I ask the Lord to grant that in Myanmar, with the support of the international community, a season of dialogue between the Government and the opposition will begin, ensuring true respect for all human rights and fundamental freedoms.⁶ Turning now to Africa, I should like first of all to reiterate my deep anguish, on observing that hope seems almost vanquished by the menacing sequence of hunger and death that is unfolding in Darfur. With all my heart I pray that the joint operation of the United Nations and the African Union, whose mission has just begun, will bring aid and comfort to the suffering populations. The peace process in the Democratic Republic of Congo is encountering strong resistance in the vicinity of the Great Lakes, especially in the Eastern regions, while Somalia, particularly Mogadishu, continues to be afflicted by violence and poverty. I appeal to the parties in conflict to cease their military operations, to facilitate the movement of humanitarian aid and to respect civilians. In recent days Kenya has experienced an abrupt outbreak of violence. I join the Bishops in their appeal made on 2 January, inviting all the inhabitants, especially political leaders, to seek a peaceful solution through dialogue, based on justice and fraternity. The Catholic Church is not indifferent to the cries of pain that rise up from these regions. She makes her own the pleas for help made by refugees and displaced persons, and she pledges herself to foster reconciliation, justice and peace. This year, Ethiopia is marking the start of the third Christian millennium, and I am sure that the celebrations organized for this occasion will also help to recall the immense social and apostolic work carried out by Christians in Africa.⁷ And finally, focussing upon Europe, I rejoice at the progress that has been made in various countries of the Balkan region, and I express once again the hope that the definitive status of Kosovo will take account of the legitimate claims of the parties involved and will guarantee security and respect for the rights of all the inhabitants of

this land, so that the spectre of violence will be definitively removed and European stability strengthened. I should like also to mention Cyprus, recalling with joy [the visit of His Beatitude Archbishop Chrysostomos II last June](#). It is my earnest wish that, in the context of the European Union, no effort will be spared in the search for a solution to a crisis that has already lasted too long. Last September, [I made a visit to Austria](#), partly in order to underline the essential contribution that the Catholic Church is able and willing to give to European unification. On the subject of Europe, I would like to assure you that I am following attentively the new phase which began with the signing of the Treaty of Lisbon. This step gives a boost to the process of building the “European home”, which “will be a good place to live for everyone only if it is built on a solid cultural and moral foundation of common values drawn from our history and our traditions” ([Meeting with the Authorities and the Diplomatic Corps, Vienna, 7 September 2007](#)) and if it does not deny its Christian roots.⁸ From this rapid overview it appears clearly that the security and stability of the world are still fragile. The factors of concern are varied, yet they all bear witness to the fact that human freedom is not absolute, but is a good that is shared, one for which all must assume responsibility. It follows that law and order are guarantees of freedom. Yet law can be an effective force for peace only if its foundations remain solidly anchored in natural law, given by the Creator. This is another reason why God can never be excluded from the horizon of man or of history. God’s name is a name of justice, it represents an urgent appeal for peace.⁹ This realization could help, among other things, to give direction to initiatives for intercultural and inter-religious dialogue. These ever increasing initiatives can foster cooperation on matters of mutual interest, such as the dignity of the human person, the search for the common good, peace-building and development. In this regard, the Holy See attaches particular importance to its participation in high-level dialogue on understanding among religions and cultures and cooperation for peace, within the framework of the 62nd General Assembly of the United Nations (4-5 October 2007). In order to be true, this dialogue must be clear, avoiding relativism and syncretism, while at the same time it must be marked by sincere respect for others and by a spirit of reconciliation and fraternity. The Catholic Church is deeply committed to this goal. It is a pleasure for me to recall once again the letter that was addressed to me, on 13 October last, by 138 Muslim Religious Leaders, and to renew my gratitude for the noble sentiments which were expressed in it.¹⁰ Our society has rightly enshrined the greatness and dignity of the human person in various declarations of rights, formulated in the wake of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which was adopted exactly sixty years ago. That solemn act, in the words of Pope Paul VI, was one of the greatest achievements of the United Nations. In every continent the Catholic Church strives to ensure that human rights are not only proclaimed but put into practice. It is to be hoped that agencies created for the defence and promotion of human rights will devote all their energies to this task and, in particular, that the Human Rights Council will be able to meet the expectations generated by its creation.¹¹ The Holy See for its part never tires of reaffirming these principles and rights, founded on what is essential and permanent in the human person. The Church willingly undertakes this service to the true dignity of human persons, created in the image of God. And on the basis of these considerations, I cannot but deplore once again the continual attacks perpetrated on every continent against human life. I would like to recall, together with many men and women dedicated to research and science, that the new frontiers reached in bioethics do not require us to choose between science and morality: rather, they oblige us to a moral use of science. On the other hand, recalling the appeal made by Pope John Paul II on the occasion of the Jubilee Year 2000, I rejoice that on 18 December last the General Assembly of the United Nations adopted a resolution calling upon States to institute a moratorium on the use of the death penalty, and I earnestly hope that this initiative will lead to public debate on the sacred character of human life. I regret, once again, the disturbing threats to the integrity of the family, founded on the marriage of a man and a woman. Political leaders, of whatever kind, should defend this fundamental institution, the basic cell of society. What more should be said? Even religious freedom, “an essential requirement of the dignity of every person [and] a cornerstone of the structure of

human rights” (*Message for the 1988 World Day of Peace*, Preamble) is often undermined. There are many places where this right cannot be fully exercised. The Holy See defends it, demands that it be universally respected, and views with concern discrimination against Christians and against the followers of other religions.¹² Peace cannot be a mere word or a vain aspiration. Peace is a commitment and a manner of life which demands that the legitimate aspirations of all should be satisfied, such as access to food, water and energy, to medicine and technology, or indeed the monitoring of climate change. Only in this way can we build the future of humanity; only in this way can we facilitate an integral development valid for today and tomorrow. With a particularly felicitous expression, Pope Paul VI stressed forty years ago in his Encyclical Letter *Populorum Progressio*, that “development is the new name for peace”. Hence, in order to consolidate peace, the positive macroeconomic results achieved by many developing countries during 2007 must be supported by effective social policies and by the implementation of aid commitments by rich countries.¹³ Finally, I wish to urge the international community to make a global commitment on security. A joint effort on the part of States to implement all the obligations undertaken and to prevent terrorists from gaining access to weapons of mass destruction would undoubtedly strengthen the nuclear non-proliferation regime and make it more effective. I welcome the agreement reached on the dismantling of North Korea’s nuclear weapons programme, and I encourage the adoption of suitable measures for the reduction of conventional weapons and for dealing with the humanitarian problems caused by cluster munitions. *Your Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen*,¹⁴ Diplomacy is, in a certain sense, the art of hope. It lives from hope and seeks to discern even its most tenuous signs. Diplomacy must give hope. The celebration of Christmas reminds us each year that, when God became a little child, Hope came to live in our world, in the heart of the human family. Today this certainty becomes a prayer: May God open the hearts of those who govern the family of peoples to the Hope that never disappoints! With these sentiments, I offer to each one of you my very best wishes, so that you, your staff, and the peoples you represent may be enlightened by the Grace and Peace which come to us from the Child of Bethlehem.

**L'Osservatore Romano* n. 2 p. 4, 5.