



# The Holy See

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**ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI  
TO H.E. Mr KENAN GÜRSOY  
NEW AMBASSADOR OF THE REPUBLIC OF TURKEY  
TO THE HOLY SEE\***

*Thursday, 7 January 2010*

*Mr Ambassador,*

I am pleased to welcome you to the Vatican and to accept the Letters accrediting you as Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of the Republic of Turkey to the Holy See. I thank you for your gracious words and for the greetings that you bring from your President, His Excellency Abdullah Gül. Please convey to him my own good wishes and assure him of my continuing prayers for the well-being and prosperity of all the citizens of your land.

As Your Excellency has observed, we are fast approaching the fiftieth anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between Turkey and the Holy See, a fruit of the pontificate of my predecessor [Pope John XXIII](#) who had himself served as Apostolic Delegate in Istanbul and whose affection for the Turkish people is well known. Much has been achieved during the last fifty years in the areas of shared interest that you have indicated, and I am confident that these cordial relations will grow deeper and stronger as a result of continuing collaboration on the many important questions that currently arise in multilateral affairs.

I recall with great pleasure [my own visit to your country in 2006](#), when I was able to pay my respects to the Turkish people and to members of your Government. I take this opportunity to renew my appreciation for the warm welcome that I received. One of the highlights of that visit was [my meeting with Patriarch Bartholomaios I in the Phanar](#). Within the secular Republic of Turkey, alongside the predominantly Muslim population, the Christian communities are proud to play their part, conscious of their ancient heritage and of the significant contribution they have made to the civilization, not only of your land, but of the whole of Europe. During the recent celebrations of the

two-thousandth anniversary of the birth of Paul of Tarsus, that Christian heritage became a focus of particular attention throughout the world, and I should like to express the appreciation of Christians everywhere for the steps that were taken to facilitate pilgrimages and liturgical celebrations at the sites associated with the great Apostle.

My visit to Turkey also provided me with a welcome opportunity to greet members of the Muslim community. Indeed it was my first visit as Pope to a predominantly Islamic country. I was glad to be able to express my esteem for Muslims and to reiterate the commitment of the Catholic Church to carry forward inter-religious dialogue in a spirit of mutual respect and friendship, bearing joint witness to the firm faith in God that characterizes Christians and Muslims, and striving to know one another better so as to strengthen the bonds of affection between us (cf. Address, Meeting with the President of the Religious Affairs Directorate, Ankara, 28 November 2006). It is my fervent prayer that this process will lead to greater trust between individuals, communities, and peoples, especially in the troubled areas of the Middle East.

The Catholics in Turkey appreciate the freedom of worship that is guaranteed by the Constitution, and are pleased to be able to contribute to the well-being of their fellow citizens, especially through involvement in charitable activity and healthcare. They are rightly proud of the assistance provided for the poor by the *La Paix* and *Saint Georges* hospitals in Istanbul. In order that these worthy endeavours may flourish, I am sure your Government will continue to do what it can to see that they receive whatever support may be needed. Furthermore, the Catholic Church in Turkey is waiting for civil juridical recognition. This would help her to enjoy full religious freedom and to make an even greater contribution to society.

As a secular democratic state that straddles the boundary between Europe and Asia, Turkey is well placed to act as a bridge between Islam and the West, and to make a significant contribution to the effort to bring peace and stability to the Middle East. The Holy See appreciates the numerous initiatives that Turkey has already taken in this regard, and is eager to support further efforts to put an end to long-standing conflicts in the region. As history has so often shown, territorial disputes and ethnic rivalries can only be satisfactorily resolved when the legitimate aspirations of each party are duly taken into account, past injustices acknowledged and, when possible, repaired. Let me assure Your Excellency of the high priority that the Holy See gives to the search for just and lasting solutions to all the conflicts of the region and of its readiness to place its diplomatic resources at the service of peace and reconciliation.

In offering my best wishes for the success of your mission, I would like to assure you that the various departments of the Roman Curia are always pleased to provide help and support in the fulfilment of your duties. Upon Your Excellency, your family and all the people of the Republic of Turkey, I cordially invoke the abundant blessings of the Almighty.

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