



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS POPE BENEDICT XVI
TO THE MEMBERS OF THE DIPLOMATIC CORPS
FOR THE TRADITIONAL EXCHANGE OF NEW YEAR GREETINGS**

Sala Regia

Monday, 11 January 2010

(Video)

*Your Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,*

This traditional meeting at the beginning of the year, two weeks after the celebration of the birth of the Incarnate Word, is a very joyful occasion for me. As we proclaimed in the liturgy: “We recognize in Christ the revelation of your love. No eye can see his glory as our God, yet now he is seen as one like us. Christ is your Son before all ages, yet now he is born in time. He has come to lift up all things to himself, to restore unity to creation” (*Preface of Christmas II*). At [Christmas](#) we contemplated the mystery of God and the mystery of creation: by the message of the angels to the shepherds, we received the good news of man’s salvation and the renewal of the entire universe. That is why, in my [Message for the 2010 World Day of Peace](#), I urged all persons of good will – those same men and women to whom the angels rightly promised peace – to protect creation. In the same spirit of joy I am happy to greet each of you today, particularly those present for the first time at this ceremony. I thank you most heartily for the good wishes conveyed to me by your Dean, Ambassador Alejandro Valladares Lanza, and I repeat how much I esteem your mission to the Holy See. Through you I send cordial greetings and good wishes for peace and happiness to the leaders and people of the countries which you worthily represent. My thoughts also go to all the other nations of the earth: the Successor of Peter keeps his door open to everyone in the hope of maintaining relations which can contribute to the progress of the human family. It is a cause for deep satisfaction that, just a few weeks ago, full diplomatic relations were established between the Holy See and the Russian Federation. The recent visit of the President of the Socialist Republic of

Vietnam was likewise very significant; Vietnam is a country close to my heart, where the Church is celebrating her centuries-long presence by a Jubilee Year. In this spirit of openness, throughout 2009 I met many political leaders from all over the world; I also visited some of them and would like to continue to do so, insofar as is possible.

The Church is open to everyone because, in God, she lives for others! She thus shares deeply in the fortunes of humanity, which in this new year continues to be marked by the dramatic crisis of the global economy and consequently a serious and widespread social instability. In my Encyclical *Caritas in Veritate*, I invited everyone to look to the deeper causes of this situation: in the last analysis, they are to be found in a current self-centred and materialistic way of thinking which fails to acknowledge the limitations inherent in every creature. Today I would like to stress that the same way of thinking also endangers creation. Each of us could probably cite an example of the damage that this has caused to the environment the world over. I will offer an example, from any number of others, taken from the recent history of Europe. Twenty years ago, after the fall of the Berlin wall and the collapse of the materialistic and atheistic regimes which had for several decades dominated a part of this continent, was it not easy to assess the great harm which an economic system lacking any reference to the truth about man had done not only to the dignity and freedom of individuals and peoples, but to nature itself, by polluting soil, water and air? The denial of God distorts the freedom of the human person, yet it also devastates creation. It follows that the protection of creation is not principally a response to an aesthetic need, but much more to a moral need, in as much as nature expresses a plan of love and truth which is prior to us and which comes from God.

For this reason I share the growing concern caused by economic and political resistance to combatting the degradation of the environment. This problem was evident even recently, during the XV Session of the Conference of the States Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change held in Copenhagen from 7 to 18 December last. I trust that in the course of this year, first in Bonn and later in Mexico City, it will be possible to reach an agreement for effectively dealing with this question. The issue is all the more important in that the very future of some nations is at stake, particularly some island states.

It is proper, however, that this concern and commitment for the environment should be situated within the larger framework of the great challenges now facing mankind. If we wish to build true peace, how can we separate, or even set at odds, the protection of the environment and the protection of human life, including the life of the unborn? It is in man's respect for himself that his sense of responsibility for creation is shown. As Saint Thomas Aquinas has taught, man represents all that is most noble in the universe (cf. *Summa Theologiae*, I, q. 29, a. 3). Furthermore, as I noted during the recent FAO World Summit on Food Security, "the world has enough food for all its inhabitants" (*Address of 16 November 2009*, No. 2) provided that selfishness does not lead some to hoard the goods which are intended for all.

I would like to stress again that the protection of creation calls for an appropriate management of the natural resources of different countries and, in the first place, of those which are economically disadvantaged. I think of the continent of Africa, which I had the joy of visiting last March during my [journey to Cameroon and Angola](#), and which was the subject of the deliberations of the recent [Special Assembly of the Synod of Bishops](#). The Synod Fathers pointed with concern to the erosion and desertification of large tracts of arable land as a result of overexploitation and environmental pollution (cf. *Propositio* 22). In Africa, as elsewhere, there is a need to make political and economic decisions which ensure “forms of agricultural and industrial production capable of respecting creation and satisfying the primary needs of all” ([Message for the 2010 World Day of Peace](#), No. 10).

How can we forget, for that matter, that the struggle for access to natural resources is one of the causes of a number of conflicts, not least in Africa, as well as a continuing threat elsewhere? For this reason too, I forcefully repeat that to cultivate peace, one must protect creation! Furthermore, there are still large areas, for example in Afghanistan or in some countries of Latin America, where agriculture is unfortunately still linked to the production of narcotics, and is a not insignificant source of employment and income. If we want peace, we need to preserve creation by rechanneling these activities; I once more urge the international community not to become resigned to the drug trade and the grave moral and social problems which it creates.

Ladies and Gentlemen, the protection of creation is indeed an important element of peace and justice! Among the many challenges which it presents, one of the most serious is increased military spending and the cost of maintaining and developing nuclear arsenals. Enormous resources are being consumed for these purposes, when they could be spent on the development of peoples, especially those who are poorest. For this reason I firmly hope that, during the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty Review Conference to be held this May in New York, concrete decisions will be made towards progressive disarmament, with a view to freeing our planet from nuclear arms. More generally, I deplore the fact that arms production and export helps to perpetuate conflicts and violence, as in Darfur, in Somalia or in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Together with the inability of the parties directly involved to step back from the spiral of violence and pain spawned by these conflicts, there is the apparent powerlessness of other countries and the international organizations to restore peace, to say nothing of the indifference, amounting practically to resignation, of public opinion worldwide. There is no need to insist on the extent to which such conflicts damage and degrade the environment. Finally, how can I fail to mention terrorism, which endangers countless innocent lives and generates widespread anxiety. On this solemn occasion, I would like to renew the appeal which I made during the [Angelus prayer of 1 January](#) last to all those belonging to armed groups, of whatever kind, to abandon the path of violence and to open their hearts to the joy of peace.

The grave acts of violence to which I have just alluded, combined with the scourges of poverty, hunger, natural disasters and the destruction of the environment, have helped to swell the ranks of

those who migrate from their native land. Given the extent of this exodus, I wish to exhort the various civil authorities to carry on their work with justice, solidarity and foresight. Here I wish to speak in particular of the Christians of the Middle East. Beleaguered in various ways, even in the exercise of their religious freedom, they are leaving the land of their forebears, where the Church took root during the earliest centuries. To offer them encouragement and to make them feel the closeness of their brothers and sisters in faith, I have convened for next autumn a Special Assembly of the Synod of Bishops on the Middle East.

Ladies and Gentlemen, to this point I have alluded only to a few aspects of the problem of the environment. Yet the causes of the situation which is now evident to everyone are of the moral order, and the question must be faced within the framework of a great programme of education aimed at promoting an effective change of thinking and at creating new lifestyles. The community of believers can and wants to take part in this, but, for it to do so, its public role must be recognized. Sadly, in certain countries, mainly in the West, one increasingly encounters in political and cultural circles, as well in the media, scarce respect and at times hostility, if not scorn, directed towards religion and towards Christianity in particular. It is clear that if relativism is considered an essential element of democracy, one risks viewing secularity solely in the sense of excluding or, more precisely, denying the social importance of religion. But such an approach creates confrontation and division, disturbs peace, harms human ecology and, by rejecting in principle approaches other than its own, finishes in a dead end. There is thus an urgent need to delineate a positive and open secularity which, grounded in the just autonomy of the temporal order and the spiritual order, can foster healthy cooperation and a spirit of shared responsibility. Here I think of Europe, which, now that the Lisbon Treaty has taken effect, has entered a new phase in its process of integration, a process which the Holy See will continue to follow with close attention. Noting with satisfaction that the Treaty provides for the European Union to maintain an “open, transparent and regular” dialogue with the Churches (Art. 17), I express my hope that in building its future, Europe will always draw upon the wellsprings of its Christian identity. As I said during my [Apostolic Visit last September to the Czech Republic](#), Europe has an irreplaceable role to play “for the formation of the conscience of each generation and the promotion of a basic ethical consensus that serves every person who calls this continent ‘home’ ” ([Meeting with Political and Civil Authorities and with the Diplomatic Corps](#), 26 September 2009).

To carry our reflection further, we must remember that the problem of the environment is complex; one might compare it to a multifaceted prism. Creatures differ from one another and can be protected, or endangered, in different ways, as we know from daily experience. One such attack comes from laws or proposals which, in the name of fighting discrimination, strike at the biological basis of the difference between the sexes. I am thinking, for example, of certain countries in Europe or North and South America. Saint Columban stated that: “If you take away freedom, you take away dignity” (*Ep. 4 ad Attela*, in *S. Columbani Opera*, Dublin, 1957, p. 34). Yet freedom cannot be absolute, since man is not himself God, but the image of God, God’s creation. For man, the path to be taken cannot be determined by caprice or willfulness, but must rather correspond to

the structure willed by the Creator.

The protection of creation also entails other challenges, which can only be met by international solidarity. I think of the natural disasters which this past year have sown death, suffering and destruction in the Philippines, Vietnam, Laos, Cambodia and Taiwan. Nor can I pass over Indonesia and, closer to us, the Abruzzi region, hit by devastating earthquakes. Faced with events like these, generous aid should never be lacking, since the life itself of God's children is at stake. Yet, in addition to solidarity, the protection of creation also calls for concord and stability between states. Whenever disagreements and conflicts arise among them, in order to defend peace they must tenaciously pursue the path of constructive dialogue. This is what happened twenty-five years ago with the Treaty of Peace and Friendship between Argentina and Chile, reached thanks to the mediation of the Apostolic See. That Treaty has borne abundant fruit in cooperation and prosperity which have in some way benefited all of Latin America. In this same area of the world, I am pleased by the rapprochement upon which Columbia and Ecuador have embarked after several months of tension. Closer to us, I am gratified by the agreement concluded between Croatia and Slovenia on arbitration regarding their sea and land borders. I am also pleased by the accord between Armenia and Turkey for the re-establishment of diplomatic relations, and I express my hope that, through dialogue, relations will improve among all the countries of the southern Caucasus. In the course of my [pilgrimage to the Holy Land](#), I urgently appealed to the Israelis and the Palestinians to dialogue and to respect each others' rights. Once again I call for a universal recognition of the right of the State of Israel to exist and to enjoy peace and security within internationally recognized borders. Likewise, the right of the Palestinian people to a sovereign and independent homeland, to live in dignity and to enjoy freedom of movement, ought to be recognized. I would also like to request the support of everyone for the protection of the identity and sacred character of Jerusalem, and of its cultural and religious heritage, which is of universal value. Only thus will this unique city, holy yet deeply afflicted, be a sign and harbinger of that peace which God desires for the whole human family. Out of love for the dialogue and peace which protect creation, I exhort the government leaders and the citizens of Iraq to overcome their divisions and the temptation to violence and intolerance, in order to build together the future of their country. The Christian communities also wish to make their own contribution, but if this is to happen, they need to be assured respect, security and freedom. Pakistan has been also hard hit by violence in recent months and certain episodes were directly aimed at the Christian minority. I ask that everything be done to avoid the reoccurrence of such acts of aggression, and to ensure that Christians feel fully a part of the life of their country. In speaking of acts of violence against Christians, I cannot fail to mention also the deplorable attack which the Egyptian Coptic community suffered in recent days, during its celebration of Christmas. Concerning Iran, I express my hope that through dialogue and cooperation joint solutions will be found on the national as well as the international level. I encourage Lebanon, which has emerged from a lengthy political crisis, to continue along the path of concord. I hope that Honduras, after a period of uncertainty and unrest, will move towards a recovery of normal political and social life. I desire the same for Guinea and Madagascar with the effective and disinterested aid of the international community.

Ladies and Gentlemen, at the end of this rapid overview which, due to its brevity, cannot mention every situation worthy of note, I am reminded of the words of the Apostle Paul, for whom “all creation groans and is in agony” and “we ourselves groan inwardly” (Rom 8:20-23). There is so much suffering in our world, and human selfishness continues in many ways to harm creation. For this reason, the yearning for salvation which affects all creation is that much more intense and present in the hearts of all men and women, believers and non-believers alike. The Church points out that the response to this aspiration is Christ “the firstborn of all creation, for in him all things in heaven and on earth were created” (Col 1:15-16). Looking to him, I exhort every person of good will to work confidently and generously for the sake of human dignity and freedom. May the light and strength of Jesus help us to respect human ecology, in the knowledge that natural ecology will likewise benefit, since the book of nature is one and indivisible. In this way we will be able to build peace, today and for the sake of generations to come. To all I wish a Happy New Year!

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