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APOSTOLIC JOURNEY OF HIS HOLINESS

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**MEETING WITH THE DIPLOMATIC CORPS
TO THE REPUBLIC OF TURKEY**

ADDRESS OF THE HOLY FATHER*

Apostolic Nunciature of Ankara

Tuesday, 28 November 2006

*Your Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,*

I have prepared my speech in French because it is the language of diplomacy, in the hope that it will be understood.

I greet you with great joy, Ambassadors charged with the noble task of representing your countries to the Republic of Turkey, and assembled here in the Nunciature to meet the Successor of Peter. I am grateful to your Vice-Dean, the Ambassador of Lebanon, for the kind words which he has addressed to me. I am pleased to reconfirm the appreciation that the Holy See has often expressed for the important duties that you perform, which today take on an increasingly global dimension. In fact, while your mission calls you above all to protect and promote the legitimate interests of your respective nations, “the inescapable interdependency, which binds the peoples of the world together more and more every day, calls upon all diplomats to become, with an ever new and original spirit, architects of the understanding among peoples, of international security, and of peace among nations.” (John Paul II, *Address to the Diplomatic Corps*, Mexico, 26 January 1979).

I want to begin by calling to mind the memorable visits of my two predecessors in Turkey, [Pope Paul VI in 1967](#) and [Pope John Paul II in 1979](#). Nor could I fail to mention Pope Benedict XV, the untiring promoter of peace during World War I, and Blessed John XXIII, the Pope known as the “friend of Turks”, who after his years as Apostolic Delegate in Turkey and Apostolic Administrator of the Latin Vicariate of Istanbul, left everyone with the memory of an attentive and loving pastor, particularly eager to meet and come to know the Turkish people, whose grateful guest he was! I am therefore happy to be a guest of Turkey today, having come here as a friend and as an apostle of dialogue and peace.

More than forty years ago, the [Second Vatican Council](#) wrote that “Peace is more than the absence of war: it cannot be reduced to the maintenance of a balance of power between opposing forces ... but it is the fruit of the right ordering of things with which the divine founder has invested human society and which must be brought about by humanity in its thirst for an ever more perfect reign of justice” ([Gaudium et Spes](#), 78). We have come to realize that true peace needs justice, to correct the economic imbalances and political disturbances which always give rise to tension and threaten every society. The recent developments in terrorism and in certain regional conflicts have highlighted the need to respect the decisions of international institutions and also to support them, in particular by giving them effective means to prevent conflicts and to maintain neutral zones between belligerents, through the presence of peacekeeping forces. All this, however, remains insufficient unless there is authentic dialogue, that is to say fruitful debate between the parties concerned, in order to arrive at lasting and acceptable political solutions, respectful of persons and peoples. I am thinking most especially of the disturbing conflict in the Middle East, which shows no sign of abating and weighs heavily on the whole of international life; I am thinking of the risk of peripheral conflicts multiplying and terrorist actions spreading. I appreciate the efforts of numerous countries currently engaged in rebuilding peace in Lebanon, Turkey among them. In your presence, Ambassadors, I appeal once more to the vigilance of the international community, that it not abandon its responsibilities, but make every effort to promote dialogue among all parties involved, which alone can guarantee respect for others, while safeguarding legitimate interests and rejecting recourse to violence. As I wrote in my first *World Day of Peace Message*, “the truth of peace calls upon everyone to cultivate productive and sincere relationships; it encourages them to seek out and to follow the paths of forgiveness and reconciliation, to be transparent in their dealings with others, and to be faithful to their word” ([1 January 2006](#), 6).

Turkey has always served as a bridge between East and West, between Asia and Europe, and as a crossroads of cultures and religions. During the last century, she acquired the means to become a great modern State, notably by the choice of a secular regime, with a clear distinction between civil society and religion, each of which was to be autonomous in its proper domain while respecting the sphere of the other. The fact that the majority of the population of this country is Muslim is a significant element in the life of society, which the State cannot fail to take into account, yet the Turkish Constitution recognizes every citizen’s right to freedom of worship and freedom of conscience. The civil authorities of every democratic country are duty bound to

guarantee the effective freedom of all believers and to permit them to organize freely the life of their religious communities. Naturally it is my hope that believers, whichever religious community they belong to, will continue to benefit from these rights, since I am certain that religious liberty is a fundamental expression of human liberty and that the active presence of religions in society is a source of progress and enrichment for all. This assumes, of course, that religions do not seek to exercise direct political power, as that is not their province, and it also assumes that they utterly refuse to sanction recourse to violence as a legitimate expression of religion. In this regard, I appreciate the work of the Catholic community in Turkey, small in number but deeply committed to contributing all it can to the country's development, notably by educating the young, and by building peace and harmony among all citizens.

As I have recently observed, "we are in great need of an authentic dialogue between religions and between cultures, capable of assisting us, in a spirit of fruitful co-operation, to overcome all the tensions together" (*Address to the Ambassadors of Countries with a Muslim Majority*, Castel Gandolfo, 25 September 2006). This dialogue must enable different religions to come to know one another better and to respect one another, in order to work for the fulfilment of man's noblest aspirations, in search of God and in search of happiness. For my part, on the occasion of my visit to Turkey, I wish to reiterate my great esteem for Muslims, encouraging them to continue to work together, in mutual respect, to promote the dignity of every human being and the growth of a society where personal freedom and care for others provide peace and serenity for all. In this way, religions will be able to play their part in responding to the numerous challenges currently facing our societies. Assuredly, recognition of the positive role of religions within the fabric of society can and must impel us to explore more deeply their knowledge of man and to respect his dignity, by placing him at the centre of political, economic, cultural and social activity. Our world must come to realize that all people are linked by profound solidarity with one another, and they must be encouraged to assert their historical and cultural differences not for the sake of confrontation, but in order to foster mutual respect.

The Church, as you know, has received a spiritual mission from her Founder and therefore she has no intention of intervening directly in political or economic life. However, by virtue of her mission and her long experience of the history of societies and cultures, she wishes to make her voice heard in international debate, so that man's fundamental dignity, especially that of the weakest, may always be honoured. Given the recent development of the phenomenon of globalized communications, the Holy See looks to the international community to give a clearer lead by establishing rules for better control of economic development, regulating markets, and fostering regional accords between countries. I have no doubt, Ladies and Gentlemen, that in your mission as diplomats you are eager to harmonize the particular interests of your country with the need to maintain good relations with other countries, and that in this way you can contribute significantly to the service of all.

The voice of the Church on the diplomatic scene is always characterized by the Gospel

commitment to serve the cause of humanity, and I would be failing in this fundamental obligation if I did not remind you of the need always to place human dignity at the very heart of our concerns. The world is experiencing an extraordinary development of science and technology, with almost immediate consequences for medicine, agriculture and food production, but also for the communication of knowledge; this process must not lack direction or a human point of reference, when it relates to birth, education, manner of life or work, of old age, or death. It is necessary to re-position modern progress within the continuity of our human history and thus to guide it according to the plan written into our nature for the growth of humanity – a plan expressed by the words of the book of Genesis as follows: “Be fruitful, multiply, fill the earth and subdue it” (1:28).

Finally, as my thoughts turn to the first Christian communities that sprang up in this land, and especially to the Apostle Paul who established several of them himself, allow me to quote from his Letter to the Galatians: “You were called to freedom, brethren; only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love be servants of one another” (5:13). Freedom is mutual service. I sincerely hope that the good relations between nations, which it is your task to serve, may also contribute increasingly to the genuine growth of humanity, created in the image of God. Such a noble goal requires the contribution of all. For this reason the Catholic Church intends to renew its co-operation with the Orthodox Church and I hope that my forthcoming meeting with Patriarch Bartholomew I at the Phanar will effectively serve this objective. As the Second Vatican Ecumenical Council emphasized, the Church seeks to cooperate with believers and leaders of all religions, and especially with Muslims, in order that together they may “preserve and promote peace, liberty, social justice and moral values” (*Nostra Aetate*, 3). I hope, from this viewpoint, that my journey to Turkey will bring abundant fruits.

Ambassadors, Ladies and Gentlemen, upon you, upon your families and upon all your co-workers, I invoke with all my heart the Blessings of the Almighty.

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