



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI
TO H.E. Mrs LAMIA ALY HAMADA MEKHEMAR
AMBASSADOR OF THE ARAB REPUBLIC OF EGYPT TO THE HOLY SEE**

Thursday, 6 November 2008

Madam Ambassador,

I am pleased to receive you, Your Excellency, and to welcome you on the occasion of the presentation of the Letters accrediting you as Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of the Arab Republic of Egypt to the Holy See. I thank you for the courteous greetings you have conveyed to me on behalf of H.E. Mr Mohamed Hosni Mubarak, President of the Republic, and the First Lady, Madam Suzanne Mubarak, whom you have served for several years. I should be grateful if you would reciprocate my best wishes for them and for the entire people of Egypt.

Egypt is a land of ancient civilization known worldwide for its monuments, arts and ancestral wisdom. Your Excellency, on your land, well known for its wisdom and balance, peoples and cultures met a mix of different religions who forged the identity of your people over the course of millennia. It accounts for the wealth of your culture which is able still today to absorb novelties while conserving its specific character.

Your Excellency, you have rightly recalled the good relations which exist between Egypt and the Holy See since the establishment of Diplomatic Relations over 60 years ago. I can only thank God who has allowed and favoured them. Egypt was already advanced in seeking to build bridges between peoples and religions. Such relations are certainly based on deep mutual respect for each one's identity, but also and above all, the real common wish to promote unity and peace both within the national boundaries and in the heart of the international milieu so as to develop dialogue and cooperation among the members of the diverse cultures and religions.

Your Excellency, you have mentioned the numerous and grave international problems which are ever and always unresolved, unfortunately often violent situations in Africa and Asia, especially in the Middle East. Egypt's efforts to foster peace, harmony and just solutions which respect the states and individuals are countless and meet those of the Holy See which is also endeavouring to foster and promote them. A climate of dialogue and rapprochement could engender a culture of peace; the day must come and succeed in eliminating or at least curtailing nationalism and tempering private or public interests. Religions can and must be peacemakers. However, unfortunately, they may be misunderstood and instrumentalized to provoke violence or death. Respect for the sensitivity and history of each country or each human and religious community, frequent consultations and multilateral meetings and especially the authentic will to seek peace favours the reconciliation of peoples and peaceful coexistence among all. This is what the Holy See sincerely desires and it is what it also desires of Egypt. In this context, I wish to praise all the efforts undertaken by this country and its governments to reach this noble objective little by little. Egypt has always been known as a land of hospitality for many refugees, Muslims and Christians, who have sought security and peace in its territory. May this noble tradition continue for the good of all! A guest welcomed is a holy storehouse entrusted by God who will know how to remember it at the opportune time.

I have just recalled the fundamental role of religions in establishing harmony among peoples, cultures and individuals. For decades the annual meetings between the Permanent Committee for Dialogue among Monotheistic Religions of the Al-Azhar al Sharif Institute and the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue seek to open a way toward reciprocal understanding and respect between Islam and Christianity. Part of the journey has already been run but the rest remains to be travelled.

This dialogue, Your Excellency, is an opportunity for the world, an occasion offered by God that must be welcomed up front and lived as best as possible. Above all it is important to promote a good reciprocal knowledge that cannot be limited to a restricted circle at the moment of dialogue, but must be spread, little by little to its boarders, to individuals who day after day, in cities and in villages, must develop a mentality of mutual respect that should bring a reciprocal esteem. The individual and humanity would benefit, as would religions. The research institutes of the Dominican and Franciscan communities present in Egypt also offer a space of interreligious encounter. Their presence and their activity show that it is possible to live as brothers in a united and serene nation.

I ask you also to transmit, Madam Ambassador, my greetings to the Catholic community in your country. Although they are not numerous, they manifest the great diversity that exists in the heart of our Church and the possibility for a harmonious coexistence among the great Christian traditions of the East and West. Its social and historical commitment among the Egyptian people in the areas of education, health care and charitable works witness to gratuitous love without religious exclusion. It is well known and appreciated by the entire Egyptian society. The Catholic Church also desires to reach the many Catholic tourists that visit it and who wish to practice their

own religion. I am convinced that they will soon be given the possibility to pray to God properly in adequate places of cult in the new tourist centres that have developed in these last years. This would be a beautiful sign that Egypt would give to the world, favouring friendly and fraternal relations among religions and peoples in full harmony with its ancient and noble tradition.

While you begin your mission as representative to the Holy See, I assure that you will always find a kind welcome and the attentive understanding of my collaborators. I extend, Madam Ambassador, my cordial wishes for your happy fulfilment, so that the harmonious relations that exist between the Arab Republic of Egypt and the Holy See can continue and deepen. Upon you, Your Excellency, your family, upon your collaborators and also upon its leaders and upon all the inhabitants of Egypt, I warmly invoke an abundance of Blessings from the All Powerful One.

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