



# HOLY SEE

PERMANENT OBSERVER MISSION OF THE HOLY SEE TO THE UNITED NATIONS 25 EAST 39th STREET, NEW YORK, NY 10016-0903 (212) 370-7885

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**Statement by  
Archbishop Giovanni Lajolo  
President  
of the Governatorate of the Vatican City State**

**General Debate of the  
61<sup>st</sup> session of the General Assembly  
of the United Nations**

**New York, 27 September 2006**

Madam President,

*Today's world and the ideology of power*

1. Not so long ago it appeared that our world was growing, at a pace beyond our control, into a single global village. Today's reality, by contrast, appears more and more fractured. Our efforts to overcome divisions and to harmonize differences have been hesitant. As the recent struggle between Israel and Hezbollah has tragically demonstrated, it is not so much the want of peacemaking and peacekeeping experience and resources which leaves vulnerable non-combatants to suffer and die; prior to this there exists the difficulty of moulding a consistent political will on the part of the international community.

In the story of the Tower of Babel, the ancient world has left us an image of our current divided state. The confusion of tongues at Babel is the symbol of the divisions, misunderstandings and hostilities spawned not by nature, but by human pride. Today, that same negative fundamental attitude has given rise to a new barbarism that threatens world peace. Terrorists, and their various organizations, are the contemporary version of it, rejecting the best achievements of our civilization. Even in an order of quite a different nature it cannot be denied that also superpowers, regional powers, aspiring powers and oppressed peoples sometimes yield to the temptation to believe, despite the evidence of history, that only force can bring about a just ordering of affairs among peoples and nations. The ideology of power can go so far as to regard the possession of nuclear weapons as an element of national pride, and it does not exclude the outrageous possibility of employing nuclear weapons against its adversaries. Meanwhile, the implementation of the Treaty of Non-proliferation of Nuclear Weapons appears to be stalled and the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty still needs to be ratified by some countries to enter into force.

*Old and new challenges of the United Nations*

2. This Organization was founded on a very different understanding of human affairs: peace can only be achieved by shared labours aimed at securing a decent and dignified life for all. Due to the East-West struggle, the United Nations was able to achieve only an impoverished sort of peace. Recently the Secretary-General's proposals set this Organization on the path of reform; its lofty goals, however, will be reached only by overcoming the narrow confines imposed by the dominance of national interests so that we may open ourselves to the vision of a world both reconciled and based on solidarity.

In this spirit, the Holy See continues to be an advocate of the United Nations and favours its ongoing reform in the fields of peacebuilding, development and human rights. In the same spirit, the Holy See commends the decision to create the Peacebuilding Commission. Too often international bodies act, if at all, only after war is under way or when innocent populations have long been under assault. When the rights of whole groups of people are violated - grievous examples could be mentioned in Europe, Asia and Africa - or when they go unprotected by their own Governments, it is entirely right and just that this Organization intervene in a timely manner by suitable means to restore justice. The need to improve the system for effective humanitarian interventions in catastrophes brought on by war, civil conflict and ethnic strife will be an important test of the UN reform agenda.

Strengthening the capacity of this Organization to foresee a conflict or to resolve conflicts through negotiation and transform them nonviolently before there is resort to force is therefore a goal of primary importance in the renewal of the Organization. In this regard, I regret to say that the Security Council's Resolution 1701 of 11<sup>th</sup> August 2006 could have been adopted with the same wording one month previously. If the repeated pleas for an immediate cessation to the violence, made by many, including Pope Benedict XVI, had been acted upon, the killing of thousands of civilians and numerous young soldiers, the flight of peoples and the enormous indiscriminate devastation need not have occurred; meanwhile none of the outcomes that some governments put forward as a reason for the continuation of hostilities in Lebanon has in fact been achieved.

As history has shown, for lack of sufficient capacity of intervention and common will, millions have died in needless conflicts: “*inutili stragi*”, that is, “*pointless massacres*”, to repeat a famous phrase of Benedict XV, Pope during the First World War. The late Pope Paul VI’s appeal, uttered in this Hall on 4<sup>th</sup> of October 1965 – “*Jamais plus la guerre*”, “*Never again war*” – today rings like an accusation in the heart of the collective conscience of humanity.

### *Development as a the high road to peace*

3. The surest way to prevent war is to address its causes. It must not be forgotten that at the root of war there are usually real and serious grievances: injustices suffered; a lack of, human rights and the rule of law; legitimate aspirations frustrated, and the exploitation of multitudes of desperate people who see no real possibility of improving their lot by peaceful means. How can we not be disturbed by the images of countless exiles and refugees living in camps and enduring subhuman conditions, or by those desperate groups who, intent upon seeking a less wretched future for themselves and their children, are driven to face the risks of illegal emigration? And what of the millions of people oppressed by misery and hunger, and exposed to lethal epidemics, who continue to cry out to our sense of humanity? These too are challenges to our desire for peace.

The fulfillment of the MDGs and the resumption of the latest WTO trade round promise economic progress, the alleviation of poverty, a reduction in terrorism and increased social harmony. Building peace for tomorrow requires doing justice today.

### *Human rights: pillars of peace*

4. Like development, the protection of human rights is an essential pillar in the edifice of world peace, for peace consists in people’s unimpeded enjoyment of their God-given rights. The Holy See hopes the newly formed Human Rights Council will enhance the enjoyment of those rights on the part of every people

and the citizens of every nation. The diversity among cultures allows for differences in emphasis and implementation of human rights, but the human nature which is their foundation and is common to the whole of human society, permits no basic human right to be eclipsed or subordinated for the sake of other rights. Every Government must clearly understand: violation of the fundamental rights of the person cannot be removed from the attention of the international community under the pretext of the inviolability of a State's internal affairs.

Among fundamental human rights, I would like to draw attention to three primary rights:

- a) the right to life: the increasing recognition of the sacredness of life, witnessed also by the growing rejection of the death penalty, needs to be matched by a thorough protection of human life precisely when it is at its weakest, that is, at its very beginning and at its natural end;
- b) the right to religious freedom: the respect for religious freedom is the respect for the intimate relationship of the believing person with God – both in its individual and social aspects – of which there is nothing more sacred;
- c) the right to freedom of thought and expression, including freedom to hold opinions without interference and to exchange ideas and information and the consequent freedom of the press: the observance of this right is necessary for the fulfillment of each person, for the respect of cultures and for the progress of science.

We must acknowledge, however, that not all fundamental rights – and in particular the three which I have mentioned – are adequately protected in every nation, and, in not a few, they are openly denied, even among States sitting on the Human Rights Council.

### *Dialogue among religions and peace*

5. Although in some cases religion continues to be cynically exploited for political ends, it is my delegation's firm belief that, at its best, truest and most

authentic, religion is a vital force for harmony and peace among peoples. It appeals to the noblest in people's nature. It binds up the wounds of war, both physical and psychological. It provides sanctuary to refugees and hospitality to migrants. It weaves bonds of solidarity that overcome every form of mistrust, and through forgiveness it lends stability to once divided societies.

Twenty years ago, the late Pope John Paul II brought together the leaders of the world's religions to pray and to bear witness to peace. That collective witness was renewed in 1993 during the Bosnian war and in 2002 following the barbarous September 11 terrorist attacks on New York and Washington. More recently, on the 23<sup>rd</sup> of July of this year, faced with the spreading war in Lebanon, Pope Benedict XVI invited Christians and all believers to join him in a day of prayer and penitence, imploring God for the gift of peace for the Holy Land and the Middle East.

In this last generation, the world's religions, their leaders and their adherents have shown themselves time and again to be willing to dialogue and to promote harmony among peoples.

### *The engagement of Benedict XVI for dialogue*

6. On Wednesday 20 September last, Pope Benedict XVI repeated his unequivocal support for interreligious and intercultural dialogue, and expressed the hope that what he had said at the University of Regensburg might *"be a boost and an encouragement for positive and even self-critical dialogue, both between religions and between modern reason and the faith of Christians"*. The Pope – as is known – expressed sadness that some passages in his academic address could have lent themselves to misinterpretation. His real intention was to explain that *"not religion and violence, but religion and reason go together"*, in the context of a critical vision of a society which seeks to exclude God from public life. Two days ago, while receiving the Ambassadors of OIC countries accredited to the Holy See, he added: *"The lessons of the past must... help us to seek paths of reconciliation, in order to live with respect for the identity and freedom of each individual, with a view to*

fruitful cooperation in the service of all humanity...respect and dialogue require reciprocity in all spheres, especially in that which concerns basic freedoms, more particularly religious freedom”.

If, on the one hand, religious motivation for violence, whatever its source, must be clearly and radically rejected, on the other, it must be emphasized that in political life one cannot disregard the contribution of the religious vision of the world and of humanity. In fact – as the Pope affirmed – were reason to turn a deaf ear to the divine and relegate religion to the ambit of subcultures, it would automatically provoke violent reactions: and violent reactions are always a falsification of true religion. The Holy Father, in defending the openness of political and cultural activity to the Transcendent, did not wish to do anything other than make a decisive contribution to the dialogue between cultures, by helping to open western thought to the riches of the patrimony of all religions.

It falls to all interested parties – to civil society as well as to States - to promote religious freedom and a sane, social tolerance that will disarm extremists even before they can begin to corrupt others with their hatred of life and liberty. This will be a significant contribution to peace among peoples, because peace can be born only from the hearts of human beings.

### *Conclusion*

7. Together with this heartfelt wish, it is my honour to conclude by conveying to you, Madam President, and to the peoples here represented, the cordial greetings of His Holiness Pope Benedict XVI. Upon the deliberations of this General Assembly, he invokes an abundance of Almighty God’s blessings.

Thank you, Madam President.