



HOLY SEE

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**Address by
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**General Debate of the
62nd session of the General Assembly
of the United Nations**

New York, 1 October 2007

Mr President,

The Holy See takes this opportunity to congratulate you on your election and looks forward to working with you. At the same time, it is my pleasure to greet the Secretary-General, His Excellency Mr Ban Ki-moon, and wish him well at his first full session of the General Assembly.

Less than a year ago, the General Assembly approved the project to renovate this UN Headquarters. Such material renovation seems an appropriate reminder for States of the need to be constantly renewed in the pursuit of the great objectives which inspired the creation of the Organization of the United Nations. Sixty-two years ago, the UN was established in order to save future generations from the scourge of war, to reaffirm faith in fundamental human rights and in the dignity and value of the human person, to ensure respect for international law and to promote social progress in universal freedom. Today, once more, we must reaffirm those values in order to deliver a forceful “no” to war and an equally forceful “yes” to human dignity.

Dialogue and cooperation among Nations

The preamble of the Charter of the UN, in its reference to the fundamental rights and the dignity of the human person, uses the word “faith” and links it to dialogue and cooperation among Nations. In this way it is affirmed that there is such a thing as universal and transcendent truth about man and his innate dignity, which is not only prior to all political activity, but determines it – so that no ideology of power can eliminate it. This innate dignity also determines the just measure of national interests which may never be considered absolute, and in defence of which not only is it never right to harm the legitimate interests of other States but there is an obligation at the same time to help promote the common good of all people. Respect for human dignity, therefore, is the deepest ethical foundation in the search for peace and in the building up of international relations corresponding to the authentic needs and hopes of all the peoples of the earth. Forgetting, or partially and selectively accepting, the above principle is what lies at the origin of conflicts, of environmental degradation and of social and economic injustices.

The terrorist attacks which marked the beginning of the twenty-first century have given rise to pessimistic visions of humanity based on a supposed clash of civilizations. At times people respond by returning to extreme forms of nationalism, or by extending justification for the use of force, or by relativizing further the values essentially tied to human dignity – in particular the universal rights to life and to religious freedom.

Nowadays, the binomial “culture and religion” is increasingly heard in this hall. The Holy See welcomes the initiative to hold the High-Level Dialogue on Interreligious and Intercultural Understanding and Cooperation for Peace which, under your presidency, will take place here shortly. Indeed, dialogue among peoples of different cultures and religions is not an option; it is something indispensable for peace and for the renewal of international life.

The Holy See hopes that the increased interest on the part of non-religious bodies and institutions will contribute to a greater respect for religious freedom everywhere. Today, the right to religious freedom continues to be disregarded and even violated in certain places. Such violation has become a pretext for various other forms of discrimination.

If religious leaders and believers expect States and societies to respect them and acknowledge their religions to be truly instruments of peace, they themselves must respect religious freedom; they must show that they are pledged to promote peace and shun violence; they must demonstrate that religion is not and must not become a pretext for conflict; and they must declare without ambiguity that to promote violence or to wage war in the name of religion is a blatant contradiction.

Peace and Security

Mr President,

In the difficult crossroads in which humanity finds itself today, the use of force no longer represents a sustainable solution. It is important to help the Conference on Disarmament find a way out of the impasse in which it has been languishing for more than a decade, relieve the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons from the severe strain to which it has been increasingly subjected lately, and give new impetus to recognizing the value of the Comprehensive Nuclear Test Ban Treaty. This year's fiftieth anniversary of the entry into force of the Statute of the International Atomic Energy Agency is a most fitting occasion to reaffirm our commitment to a peaceful future through the non-proliferation of nuclear weapons, the reduction and definitive dismantling of existing nuclear weapons and the non-discriminatory, peaceful and safe use of nuclear technology.

Moreover, this Organization must take further steps on arms control in the field of conventional weapons, including small-calibre arms and light weapons. The Holy See associates itself with all appeals that underline the importance of adopting a common approach aimed at combating not only illegal traffic in such weapons but also other connected activities, such as terrorism, organized crime, trafficking in drugs and in precious raw materials.

Another important area in which the Holy See urges serious and effective action on the part of the international community is that of cluster munitions. A rapid response to this problem is becoming an ethical imperative because of the high cost in human life, the majority of the victims being civilians and especially children.

Prevention, Peacekeeping and Peacebuilding

This Organization has many times expressed its willingness to devote more resources to conflict prevention, especially in the area of mediation. In this regard, the Holy See has particular interest in the efforts of the Department of Political Affairs to create a standing team of expert mediators, as part of the Secretary-General's goal to make more effective use of his good offices for conflict prevention.

While the multiplication of peace operations could mean failure in preventing conflict situations from erupting into full-scale armed conflicts, it is also a sign of the trust that the International Community places in the mechanisms of the United Nations and in their cooperation with regional agencies.

In this context, we look forward to the day that peacekeeping efforts in Darfur will finally be fully operational. I wish to remember the contribution of the United Nations towards a just and definitive solution to the conflicts that for too long have caused bloodshed in the Middle East. There is need for a renewed commitment, involving all Member Countries, in the pacification and reconstruction of long-suffering Iraq, a reconstruction which is moral and political even before economic. There is a need for renewed commitment in the search for a solution, through dialogue, of the conflict between Israelis and Palestinians, which is capable of recognizing the legitimate expectations of each side. Renewed commitment is needed in assuring that Lebanon will continue to be a free and independent country, a democratic, multicultural and multi-confessional society, equitable and respectful of all people and of the various tendencies present in its midst, like a common home open to others. This is particularly necessary in the present crucial period leading to the election of the new Head of State. Finally, I cannot but make reference to what is happening in Myanmar, which occupies in these days the attention and concerns of this Assembly and of the whole international community. I wish to reiterate the appeal made yesterday by Pope Benedict XVI: *Through dialogue, good will and a spirit of humanity, may a solution to the crisis be found quickly for the good of the country and a better future for all its inhabitants.*

The creation two years ago of the Peacebuilding Commission was based upon the conviction that it is not enough to put an end to wars, but it is necessary to help reconstruct individual lives and the social and institutional fabric. Now, the biggest

test of the International Community is to give to the PBC the mandate and means to prove on the ground that it can successfully manage and support the difficult transition from war and misery to peace and development.

Recognizing and responding to needs and hopes

Many of the problems that today are attributed almost exclusively to cultural and religious differences have their origin in economic and social injustices. Freedom from want – illness, hunger, ignorance – is a necessary presupposition for a serene dialogue of civilizations.

Forty years ago, in his Encyclical *Populorum Progressio*, Pope Paul VI stated that *development is the new name for peace*.

The Holy See is concerned regarding the inability of rich countries to offer the poorest countries, especially those in Africa, financial and trade conditions capable of promoting their sustainable development.

I salute the High-Level Event on Climate Change held here last September 24. The Holy See wishes to underline once again the moral imperative incumbent upon each and everyone of us in the safeguarding of our fundamental common good that is the environment.

Building and nurturing fraternal relationships

Mr President,

We are approaching the sixtieth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, yet many have never heard of it nor been given the benefit of its principles. These rights are not based on the mere will of human beings, nor in the reality of the State, nor in public powers, but rather are grounded in the objective requirements of the nature bestowed on man.

The most important part of our work in this context is to ensure that the right to life is respected everywhere. This fundamental right must be protected from conception until natural death. Therefore, we must work to stop and reverse the culture of death embraced by some social and legal structures that try to make the suppression of life acceptable by disguising it as a medical or social service. In this sense, the abolition of the death penalty should also be seen as a consequence of full respect for the right to life.

The legitimate quest for equality between men and women has achieved positive results. Nevertheless, inequalities in the exercise of basic human rights unfortunately

still persist in many places. This leads to a breakdown in the social fabric and results in women's objectification and exploitation. The vindication of equality needs to be accompanied by the awareness that it goes hand in hand with and does not endanger, much less contradict, the recognition of both the difference and complementarity between men and women.

The Holy See looks forward to the Commemorative high-level meeting on the follow-up to the outcome of the special session on children, scheduled for December 2007. It will be an opportunity to refocus our commitments to children and to redouble our efforts to promote their rights, end violence against them and support the family.

"Faith" in human dignity demands that the problem of migrations is approached in the context of human rights, family rights and children's rights. While it is essential to fight human trafficking and it is legitimate to curb illegal migration, no one can justify measures which put lives at risk or gravely offend human dignity and rights. The Holy See welcomes the momentum created by the first meeting of the Global Forum on Migration and Development, held in Brussels in July, and looks forward to more progress in this regard.

Mr President,

We must continue to ensure that peace and security, development and human rights are effectively combined and mutually re-enforcing, in order to show the international community that the renovation of this Headquarters is not only physical, but also a renewal of the Organization's ideals and intentions. A renewal that reaches into the deepest corners of this Organization is one in which all nations of the world will rightly take pride.

Thank you, Mr President.