



# General Assembly

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Plenary  
95<sup>th</sup> Meeting (AM)

## **POPE BENEDICT XVI URGES WORLD LEADERS TO 'ACT JOINTLY' ON GLOBAL PROBLEMS, SUPPORT**

### **INSTITUTIONS THAT PROMOTE 'COMMON GOOD', IN GENERAL ASSEMBLY ADDRESS**

**Secretary-General: 'In So Many Ways, Our Mission Unites Us with Yours:'**  
**Assembly President: Visit Recognition of Validity of International Institutions**

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**The General Assembly met today to hear an address by His Holiness Pope Benedict XVI.**

#### **Welcoming Address by General Assembly President**

**SRGJAN KERIM, President of the General Assembly**, welcoming His Holiness Pope Benedict XVI, said the word "Ecclesia" stood for both an assembly and a church. He expressed his sincere feelings of appreciation on behalf of the United Nations Ecclesia towards Pope Benedict XVI, as the supreme shepherd of all Catholics. The month of April had extraordinary meaning and significance in Pope Benedict XVI's life, as he was born on 16 April, was appointed Cardinal-Bishop of Velletri-Segni on 5 April 1993, elected Bishop of Rome on 19 April 2005 and his pontificate started on 24 April 2005. Mr. Kerim then wished Pope Benedict XVI a happy birthday and a happy anniversary.

Mr. Kerim said that in Pope Benedict XVI's message to the people of the United States he had described his visit "as a fraternal gesture towards every ecclesial community, and the sign of friendship for members of other religious traditions and all men and women of goodwill".

Mr. Kerim then said: "Your presence here today is a very powerful recognition of the validity and importance of international institutions, particularly the United Nations. In a world full of controversies which can escalate into conflicts, violence and atrocities, the role of international institutions is without alternative. Effective multilateralism remains our goal, so as to achieve peace and stability on Earth."

**"I am deeply convinced that the United Nations can count on your full support as the Holy Father of the Catholic community, a community of more than one billion people, in promoting a profound dialogue between cultures, peoples, nations and religion," Mr Kerim said.**

The visit of Pope Benedict XVI to the United Nations provided a unique occasion to remind the United Nations of its noble mission, as set out in the Charter, he said, which was "to reaffirm faith in fundamental human rights, in the dignity and worth of the human person, in the equal rights of men and women and of nations large and small... to practice tolerance and live together in peace with one another as good neighbours..." Tolerance was the foundation of freedom of the individual, including freedom of faith.

The essence of the United Nations was development for all, based on equity and equality of all persons as well as on global partnership, Mr Kerim said. That made the United Nations so valuable. A strong development agenda based on novel approaches to financing for development, environmental protection and achieving the Millennium Development Goals would be a high priority for the Organization in the decades to come.

Noting that as this year was the sixtieth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Mr. Kerim said Pope Benedict XVI had rightly observed that “the need for global solidarity is as urgent as ever”. The Declaration embodied the higher virtues of the human family. It compelled the human family to move principled intentions to action that promoted human rights, human security, the responsibility to protect and more sustainable development.

“I believe these are the pillars for a more just multilateralism -- a new culture of international relations -- based on peace and tolerance with the United Nations at its heart,” Mr. Kerim said. “The new culture of international relations should have as its core principle the responsibility of all States, international and transnational institutions as well as civil society and NGOs [non-governmental organizations] to work together in solidarity in order to provide every individual with equality of access to rights and opportunities.”

There was a moral and institutional obligation to reshape international organizations to facilitate those opportunities, Mr. Kerim said. He expressed his high appreciation for the Holy See’s valuable contribution to the General Assembly’s work, particularly its important role in promoting social justice, providing education and alleviating poverty and hunger worldwide.

#### **Welcoming Address by Secretary-General**

**BAN KI-MOON, United Nations Secretary-General**, said he was deeply grateful that Pope Benedict XVI had accepted his invitation to visit the United Nations — home to all men and women of faith worldwide. He welcomed Pope Benedict to “our common home”. The United Nations was a secular institution, comprising 192 States, with six official languages, but no official religion. It did not have a chapel, although it did have a meditation room. “But if you ask those of us who work for the United Nations what motivates us, many of us reply in a language of faith. We see what we do not only as a job, but as a mission,” the Secretary-General said. “Indeed, mission is the word we use most often for our work around the world — from peace and security to development and human rights. Your Holiness, in so many ways, our mission unites us with yours.”

Pope Benedict XVI had spoken of the terrible challenge of poverty afflicting so much of the world’s population, and how “we cannot afford indifference and self-centred isolation”, the Secretary-General said. Pope Benedict XVI had encouraged the non-proliferation of nuclear weapons, and had called for progressive and agreed-upon nuclear disarmament. He had spelled out that those with the greater power may not use it to violate the rights of others, and stated that peace was based on respect for the rights of all. He had also spoken of water resources and climate change as matters of grave importance for the entire human family. **He had called for an open and sincere dialogue, both within his church and between religions and cultures, in search of the good of humankind.**

**Finally, he had called for trust in, and commitment to, the United Nations. As Pope Benedict XVI has said, the United Nations role was “capable of fostering genuine dialogue and understanding, reconciling divergent views, and developing multilateral policies and strategies capable of meeting the manifold challenges of our complex and challenging world”.**

The Secretary-General said the United Nations shared those fundamental goals and was grateful to have the prayers of Pope Benedict XVI as it moved on the path towards them. Before leaving the United Nations today, Pope Benedict XVI would visit the Meditation Room. Former Secretary-General Dag Hammarskjöld, who created that room, had put it well. Of the stone that formed its centrepiece, Mr. Hammarskjöld had said: “We may see it as an altar, empty not because there is no God, not because it is an altar to an unknown God, but because it is dedicated to the God whom man worships under many names and in many forms.”

The Secretary-General then said: “Whether we worship one God, many or none -- we in the United Nations have to sustain and strengthen our faith every day. As the demands on our Organization multiply, we need more and more of this precious commodity. I am profoundly grateful to his Holiness Pope Benedict XVI for bestowing some of his faith on us -- and for placing his trust in us. He possesses both of these in abundance.”

#### **Address by Pope Benedict XVI**

**His Holiness POPE BENEDICT XVI** said that the peoples represented in the Hall looked to the United Nations to carry forward the founding inspiration to establish a “centre for harmonizing the actions of nations in the attainment of these common ends” of peace and development, as written in the United Nations Charter. As Pope John

Paul II said to the General Assembly at its fiftieth anniversary in 1995, the Organization should be “a moral centre where all the nations of the world feel at home and develop a shared awareness of being, as it were, a ‘family of nations’”.

Through the United Nations, he said, States had established universal objectives which, even if they did not coincide with the total common good of the human family, undoubtedly represented a fundamental part of that good. The Organization’s founding principles — the desire for peace, the quest for justice, respect for the dignity of the person, humanitarian cooperation and assistance — expressed the just aspirations of the human spirit and constituted the ideals which should underpin international relations.

The Catholic Church and the Holy See followed that attentively and with interest, seeing in the United Nations activity an example of how issues and conflicts concerning the world community could be subjected to common regulation. The United Nations embodied the aspiration for a greater degree of international ordering, as John Paul II had said, inspired and governed by the principle of subsidiarity, and therefore capable of responding to the demands of the human family through binding international rules and through structures capable of harmonizing the day-to-day unfolding of peoples’ lives. “This was all the more necessary at a time when we experience the obvious paradox of a multilateral consensus that continues to be in crisis because it is still subordinated to the decisions of a few, whereas the world’s problems called for interventions in the form of collective action by the international community.”

Indeed, he said, questions of security, development goals, reduction of local and global inequalities, protection of the environment, of resources and of climate, required all international leaders to act jointly and to show a readiness to work in good faith, respecting the law and promoting solidarity with the weakest regions of the planet. He was thinking especially of those countries in Africa and other parts of the world which remained on the margins of authentic integral development and were, therefore, at risk of experiencing only the negative effects of globalization.

In the context of international relations, it was necessary to recognize the higher role played by rules and structures that were intrinsically ordered to promote the **common good**, and therefore to safeguard human freedom, he said. Those regulations did not limit freedom. On the contrary, they promoted it when they prohibited behaviour and actions which worked against the common good, curbed its effective exercise and hence compromised the dignity of every human person. In the name of freedom, there had to be a correlation between rights and duties, by which every person was called to assume responsibility for his or her choices, made as a consequence of entering into relations with others.

He said that, notwithstanding the enormous benefits humanity could gain from the results of scientific research and technological advances, some instances were a clear violation of the order of creation, to the point where, not only was the sacred character of life contradicted, but also rediscovered the authentic image of creation. That never required a choice to be made between science and ethics: rather, that was a question of **adopting a scientific method that was truly respectful of ethical imperatives.**

He said that recognition of the unity of the human family and attention to the innate dignity of every man and woman today found renewed emphasis in the principle of the “responsibility to protect”. That had only recently been defined, but it was already present implicitly at the origins of the United Nations, and was now increasingly characteristic of its activity. Every State had the primary duty to protect its own population from grave and sustained violations of human rights, as well as from the consequences of humanitarian crises, whether natural or manmade. If States were unable to guarantee such protection, the international community must intervene with the juridical means provided in the Charter and in other international instruments. The action of the international community and its institutions, provided that it respected the principles undergirding the international order, should never be interpreted as an unwarranted imposition or a limitation of sovereignty. “On the contrary, it was indifference or failure to intervene that did the real damage.” **What was needed was a deeper search for ways of pre-empting and managing conflicts by exploring every possible diplomatic avenue, and giving attention and encouragement to even the faintest sign of dialogue or desire for reconciliation.**

Continuing, he said that the principle of “responsibility to protect” was considered by the ancient *ius gentium* as the foundation of every action taken by those in Government with regard to the governed: at the time when the concept of national sovereign States was first developing, the Dominican Friar Francisco de Vitoria, rightly considered as a precursor of the idea of the United Nations, described that responsibility as an aspect of natural reason shared by all nations, and the result of an international order whose task it was to regulate relations between peoples. Now, as then, that principle had to invoke the idea of the person as image of the Creator, the desire for the absolute and the essence of freedom.

The founding of the United Nations coincided with the profound upheavals that humanity experienced when reference to the meaning of transcendence and natural reason was abandoned, and in consequence, freedom and human dignity were grossly violated, he continued. When that happened, it threatened the objective foundations of the values

inspiring and governing the international order and it undermined the cogent and inviolable principles formulated and consolidated by the United Nations. When faced with new and insistent challenges, it was a mistake to fall back on a pragmatic approach, limited to determining “common ground”, minimal in content and weak in its effect.

He said that the reference to human dignity, which was the foundation and goal of the responsibility to protect, led to the focus of this year, which marked the sixtieth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. That document had been the outcome of a convergence of different religious and cultural traditions, all of them motivated by the common desire to place the human person at the heart of institutions, laws and the workings of society, and to consider the human person essential for the world of culture, religion and science. Human rights were increasingly being presented as the common language and the ethnical substratum of international relations. At the same time, the universality, indivisibility and interdependence of human rights all served as guarantees safeguarding human dignity.

It was evident, however, that the rights recognized and expounded in the Declaration applied to everyone by virtue of the common origin of the person, who remained the high point of God’s creative design for the world and for history. They were based on the natural law inscribed on human hearts and presented in different cultures and civilizations. Removing human rights from that context would mean restricting their range and yielding a relativistic conception, according to which the meaning and interpretation of rights could vary and their universality would be denied in the name of different cultural, political, social and even religious outlooks. That great variety of viewpoints must not be allowed to obscure the fact that, not only were rights universal, but so too was the human person, the subject of those rights.

The promotion of human rights remained the most effective strategy for eliminating inequalities between countries and social groups, and for increasing security, he said. Indeed, the victims of hardship and despair, whose human dignity was violated with impunity, became easy prey to the call to violence, and they could then become “violators of peace”. The common good that human rights helped to accomplish could not, however, be attained merely by applying correct procedures, nor even less by achieving a balance between competing rights. The merit of the Universal Declaration was that it had enabled different cultures, juridical expressions and institutional models to converge around a fundamental nucleus of values, and hence of rights.

Today, however, efforts should be redoubled in the face of pressure to reinterpret the foundations of the Declaration and to compromise its inner unity so as to facilitate a move away from the protection of human dignity towards the satisfaction of simple interests, often particular interests. The Declaration had been adopted as a common standard of achievement and could not be applied piecemeal, according to trends of selective choices that merely ran the risk of contradicting the unity of the human person and thus the indivisibility of human rights.

As history proceeded, new situations arose, and the attempt was made to link them to new rights, he said. Discernment, or the capacity to distinguish good from evil, became even more essential in the context of demands that concerned the very lives and conduct of persons, communities and peoples. In tackling the theme of rights, since important situations and profound realities were involved, discernment was both an indispensable and a fruitful virtue. Discernment, then, showed that, entrusting exclusively to individual States with their laws and institutions the final responsibility to meet the aspirations of persons, communities and entire peoples, could sometimes have consequences that excluded the possibility of a social order respectful of the dignity and rights of the person. On the other hand, a vision of life firmly anchored in the religious dimension could help to achieve that, since recognition of the transcendent value of every man and woman favoured conversion of heart, which then led to a commitment to resist violence, terrorism and war, and to promote justice and peace.

**Dialogue should be recognized as the means by which the various components of society could articulate their point of view and build consensus around the truth concerning particular values or goals, he continued. It pertained to the nature of religions, freely practiced, that they could autonomously conduct a dialogue of thought and life. If at that level, too, the religious sphere was kept separate from political action, then great benefits ensured for individuals and communities. On the other hand, the United Nations could count on the results of dialogue between religions and could draw fruit from the willingness of believers to place their experiences at the service of the common good.**

Human rights must include the right to religious freedom, he said, adding that the activity of the United Nations in recent years had ensured that public debate gave space to viewpoints inspired by a religious vision in all its dimensions, including ritual, worship, education, dissemination of information and the freedom to profess and choose religion. It was inconceivable then that believers should have to suppress a part of themselves — their faith — in order to be active citizens. It should never be necessary to deny God in order to enjoy one’s rights. The rights associated with religion were all the more in need of protection if they were considered to clash with a prevailing secular ideology or with majority religious positions of an exclusive nature.

The full guarantee of religious liberty could not be limited to the free exercise of worship, but had to give due consideration to the public dimension of religion, and hence to the possibility of believers playing their part in building the social order. Refusal to recognize the contribution to society that was rooted in the religious dimension and in the quest for the Absolute — by its nature, expressing communion between persons — would effectively privilege an individualistic approach and would fragment the unity of the person.

**He said his presence at the Assembly “is a sign of esteem for the United Nations, and it is intended to express the hope that the Organization will increasingly serve as a sign of unity between States and an instrument of service to the entire human family”.** It also demonstrated the willingness of the Catholic Church to offer her proper contribution to building international relations in a way that allowed every person and every people to feel they could make a difference. In a manner that was consistent with her contribution in the ethical and moral sphere and the free activity of her faithful, the Church also worked for the realization of those goals through the international activity of the Holy See. Indeed, the Holy See had always had a place at the assemblies of the Nations, thereby manifesting its specific character as a subject in the international domain. As the United Nations recently confirmed, the Holy See thereby made its contribution according to the dispositions of international law, helped to define that law and made appeal to it.

The United Nations remained a privileged setting in which the Church was committed to contributing her experience of humanity, developed over the centuries among peoples of every race and culture, and placing it at the disposal of all members of the international community, he said. That experience and activity, directly towards attaining freedom for every believer, sought also to increase the protection given to the rights of the person. Those rights were grounded and shaped by the transcendent nature of the person, which permitted men and women to pursue their journey of faith and their search for God in this world. Recognition of that dimension must be strengthened in order to sustain humanity’s hope for a better world and create the conditions for peace, development, cooperation and guarantee of rights for future generations.

He recalled that in his recent Encyclical he had indicated that “every generation has the task of engaging anew in the arduous search for the right way to order human affairs”. For Christians, that task was motivated by the hope drawn from the saving work of Jesus Christ. That was why the Church was happy to be associated with the activity of this distinguished Organization, charged with the responsibility of promoting peace and goodwill throughout the Earth.

He promised the Assembly the support of his prayers as it pursued its noble task, and he offered his greetings in the official languages, to all the nations represented there.

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