

BENEDICT XVI RECEIVES GEORGIAN PRESIDENT

Commitment to Intercultural Exchanges Discussed

VATICAN CITY, MAY 7, 2010 ([Zenit.org](http://www.zenit.org)).- Benedict XVI received in audience today the president of Georgia, Mikhail Saakashvili, during which the two spoke of a commitment to intercultural exchanges.

A communiqué published by the Vatican after the meeting noted that the meetings "provided an opportunity to examine various bilateral questions, and other important matters concerning life in Georgia, restating the commitment of the parties in favor of intercultural exchange."

The Catholic Church in Georgia, which is comprised of less than 1% of the entire population of the country, sees ecumenism as one of its principal tasks, in particular with the Orthodox Church.

During the meeting today in the Vatican, "the hope was expressed that all difficulties will be overcome through dialogue and negotiation among the parties concerned."

Also recognized was "the positive humanitarian contributions made by Caritas to the population," as well as the "encouragement given to the peaceful coexistence of believers from various religions, for the sake of the common good."

Last September, Caritas Georgia was a first responder to an earthquake that hit the nation. The aid agency helped as well to rebuild housing and infrastructure in the months following the quake.

Saakashvili subsequently went on to meet with the Pope's secretary of state, Cardinal Tarcisio Bertone, who was accompanied by Archbishop Dominique Mamberti, secretary for relations with states.

Georgia has a population of 4.61 million people, of which more than 83% are Orthodox Christian. A 2002 census recorded that 9.9% are Muslim and less than 1% are Catholic.