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# Benedict XVI Hopes Visit to Lebanon Fosters Dialogue of Peace

**Reflects on Apostolic Journey in Weekly General Audience**

By Junno Arocho

VATICAN CITY, SEPT. 20, 2012 ([Zenit.org](http://www.zenit.org)).- Pope Benedict XVI reflected on his recent Apostolic Visit to Lebanon yesterday during his weekly General Audience in Rome, saying it was visit he "greatly desired". Addressing the 8,000 pilgrims attending the audience, the Holy Father said the visit gave an occasion for dialogue in a country known for its tradition of peaceful coexistence between people of different faiths.

The Pope also expressed his solidarity with those suffering in areas of conflict within the Middle East, particularly Syria and Iraq. "Confronted by the sufferings and tragedies that continue in that area of the Middle East, I expressed my heartfelt closeness to the legitimate aspirations of those dear people, bringing them a message of encouragement and peace," he said.

"I am thinking particularly of the terrible conflict plaguing Syria, which in addition to thousands of deaths, is causing a stream of refugees to pour out of the region in a desperate search for security and for a future; nor can I forget the plight in Iraq."

The Holy Father recalled the enthusiasm of those present during his visit, particularly the Catholic faithful, representatives of other Churches, and representatives of the Muslim community, calling it "a powerful sign of hope for all mankind". He also thanked the Catholic faithful who organized his visit to the Middle Eastern nation, as well as the Lebanese government.

The 85 year old Pontiff conveyed his gratitude to the Muslim community, who fostered an atmosphere of sincere dialogue between the two faiths.

"Muslims welcomed me with great respect and sincere regard: their constant and engaging presence gave me the opportunity to propose a message of dialogue and of collaboration between Christianity and Islam: it seems to me that the moment has come to join in giving a sincere and decisive testimony against divisions, against violence and against wars," he said.

After reflecting on various moments of his visit, the Pope concluded his address, expressing his hope that the witness of communion given by those of different faiths in Lebanon could inspire governments in the Middle East to encourage a dialogue of peace." I hope that the various messages of peace and esteem that I wished to give may help governments of the region to take decisive steps forward toward peace and toward a better understanding of Christian-Muslim relations," he said.

"For my part, I continue to accompany those beloved peoples in prayer that they may remain faithful to the commitments they have assumed. To the maternal intercession of Mary, who is venerated at so many and such ancient Lebanese shrines, I entrust the fruits of this pastoral visit, as well as the good intentions and just aspirations of the entire Middle East."

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On ZENIT's web page:

For the full text of the Holy Father's weekly General Audience, go to <http://www.zenit.org/article-35570?l=english>

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