

UNITED NATIONS



NATIONS UNIES

THE SECRETARY-GENERAL
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REMARKS TO INTRODUCE HIS HOLINESS
POPE BENEDICT XVI
TO THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY
OF THE UNITED NATIONS
New York, 18 April 2008

Your Holiness,
Excellencies,

I am deeply grateful to His Holiness for accepting my invitation to visit the United Nations -- home to all men and women of faith around the world. Your Holiness, welcome to our common home.

The United Nations is a secular institution, composed of 192 States. We have six official languages but no official religion. We do not have a chapel -- though we do 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. Indeed, mission is the word we use most often for our work around the world -- from peace and security to development to human rights.

Your Holiness, in so many ways, our mission unites us with yours.

You have 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.

You have encouraged the non-proliferation of nuclear weapons, and called for progressive and agreed-upon nuclear disarmament.

You have spelled out that those with greater power may not use it to violate the rights of others, and stated that peace is based on respect for the rights of all.

You have spoken of water resources and climate change as matters of grave importance for the entire human family.

You have called for an open and sincere dialogue, both within your Church and between religions and cultures, in search of the good of humankind.

Finally, you have called for trust in, and commitment to, the United Nations. As you have said, the UN is “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 rapidly changing world.”

Your Holiness, these are fundamental goals we share. We are grateful to have your prayers as we proceed on the path towards them.

Before leaving the UN today, you will visit the Meditation Room. My great predecessor, Dag Hammarskjöld, who created that room, put it well. He said of the stone that forms its centerpiece [*and I quote*]: “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.” *End quote.*

Excellencies,

Whether we worship one God, many or none -- we in the United Nations have to sustain and strengthen our faith every day. As 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. May we be strengthened by his visit today.

Thank you very much.