

18 April 2008

**Statement of H.E. Mr. Srgjan Kerim,
President of the 62nd Session of the General Assembly,
on the Occasion of the Visit of His Holiness Pope Benedict XVI**

Your Holiness,
Excellencies, distinguished delegates,
Ladies and gentleman,

It is an immense honor for me as the President of the United Nations General Assembly to welcome the head of the Roman Catholic Church, His Holiness Pope Benedict XVI.

The word "Ecclesia" stands for both, an assembly and a church. Therefore, Your Holiness, allow me to express my sincere feelings of appreciation on behalf of the peoples of the United Nations Ecclesia towards you as the supreme shepherd of all Catholics.

The month of April has an extraordinary meaning and significance in your life. Not only because you were born on April 16th but also because you were appointed Cardinal-Bishop of Velletri – Segni on April 5th 1993, you were elected Bishop of Rome on April 19th 2005 and your pontificate started on April 24th 2005.

So, Your Holiness, happy birthday and happy anniversary!

In your message to the people of the United States you described your 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 good will.”

Your presence here today is a very powerful recognition of the validity and importance of international institutions, particularly of 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 religions.

Excellencies,

The visit of His Holiness Pope Benedict XVI to the United Nations provides a unique occasion to remind ourselves of our noble mission, as it is set out in the Charter:

"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 neighbors..."

For, tolerance is the foundation of freedom of the individual, including freedom of faith.

Your Holiness,

The essence of the United Nations agenda is development for all, based on equity and equality of all persons as well as on global partnership. That makes the United Nations so valuable.

A strong developmental agenda based on novel approaches to financing for development, environmental protection and achieving the Millenium Development Goals is a high priority for the United Nations in the decades to come.

This year is the 60th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights; and, as Your Holiness rightly observed: "the need for global solidarity is as urgent as ever."

The Declaration embodies the higher virtues of the human family: it compells us to move principled intentions to action that promotes human rights, human security, 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.

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 to work together in solidarity in order to provide every individual with equality of access to rights and opportunities.

Our moral and institutional obligation is to reshape international organizations to facilitate these opportunities.

In this regard, let me express my high appreciation for the valuable contribution of the Holy See to the work of the General Assembly and in particular for your important role in promoting social justice, providing education and alleviating poverty and hunger around the world.

Your Holiness, we count on your continued blessing and support as we pursue our work.

I thank you for your attention.