



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI
TO H.E. Mr. NASER MUHAMED YOUSSEF AL BELOOSHI
FIRST AMBASSADOR OF THE KINGDOM OF BAHRAIN
TO THE HOLY SEE**

Clementine Hall
Thursday, 18 December 2008

Mr Ambassador,

It is with great joy that I welcome you to the Vatican for the presentation of the Letters accrediting you as the first Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of the Kingdom of Bahrain to the Holy See. I thank you for the kind words you have addressed to me and for the greetings and the invitation you have conveyed to me from His Majesty King Hamad bin Isa al-Khalifah. In return, please assure him of my best wishes for him and for the inhabitants of the Kingdom that they may all live in peace and prosperity.

The visit His Majesty paid to me at Castel Gandolfo last July, as well as your appointment, Your Excellency, as the first Ambassador of the Kingdom of Bahrain, are signs of the good relations that your country wishes to pursue with the Holy See. I am truly delighted and hope that they will become even deeper.

The developments in the Kingdom in recent years express its constant anxiety to advance towards establishing a society open to the world and for increasingly fraternal relations with other nations, while remaining faithful to its legitimate traditional values. The participation of the greatest possible number in the guidance and management of the country's life can only help to maintain unity and solidarity among the various members of society, as well as encourage the common good.

I would like to acknowledge your country's commitment, which you emphasized, Mr Ambassador, to promoting a policy of peace and dialogue. Indeed, the Kingdom of Bahrain has a long tradition

of tolerance and hospitality. In particular, it accepts numerous foreign workers who take part in the country's development. When they are far from their countries of origin and their families, which can only render their lives more difficult, may they feel at home in your country, thanks to the welcome they are given!

Among these foreign workers, a large number are Catholic. I would like here to thank the Authorities of the Kingdom for the welcome offered to them and for the possibility they are given to practise their religion. I am, moreover, glad to recall that the church built in 1939, on a piece of land donated by the Emir of that time, was the first church to be built in the Gulf States. Nevertheless, all are aware that today, with the increase in the number of Catholics, it would be desirable for them to have other places of worship at their disposal.

Respect for religious freedom which is one of the rights guaranteed by your country's Constitution is of the utmost importance because it affects the most profound and sacred dimension of man: his relationship with God. Religion provides the response to the question of the true meaning of life in the personal and social domains. Religious freedom that enables each one to live his belief alone or with others, in private or in public, also requires the possibility for the person to change his religion should his conscience so require. Moreover, at the time of the Second Vatican Council, the Catholic Church solemnly stressed the obligation that man has to follow his conscience in all circumstances and that no one be forced to act contrary to his conscience (cf. Declaration on Religious Liberty, *Dignitatis humanae*, n. 3).

Your country is also concerned to contribute to establishing an authentic dialogue between cultures and between the members of the different religions. Indeed, it is indispensable that an increasingly sincere understanding between people and among civil and religious groups develop, in order to establish increasingly fraternal relations. This begins with listening to one another respectfully on the basis of reciprocal esteem. While recognizing the divergences that separate us, Christians and Muslims, as well as our different approaches on many points, it is important that we collaborate in the world today to defend and promote the essential values of life and the family that enable man to live in fidelity to the one God and enable society to establish itself in peace and solidarity.

Through you, Mr Ambassador, I would also like to greet the Catholic community in your country very warmly, as well as its Vicar Apostolic. I ask God to support them in their faith and to help them to be authentic witnesses of the hope that enlivens them. In the Kingdom of Bahrain, as in all countries, Catholics seek to contribute to the good of society. Thus, the Sacred Heart School run by Carmelite women religious who provide high quality teaching for the young, regardless of their origin or religion, has for many years been an eloquent sign of this commitment.

In this perspective I hope that the local Church and her institutions may always make their own contribution to the good of all society, in trusting dialogue and in effective collaboration with the

country's Authorities.

Mr Ambassador, at the time when you are beginning your mission to the Holy See, I address my cordial good wishes to you for its success and I assure you of the availability of my collaborators among whom you will always find understanding and support so that it may develop smoothly.

Upon you, your family and your collaborators, as well as on all the inhabitants of the Kingdom of Bahrain and their leaders, I wholeheartedly invoke an abundance of Blessings from the Most High.

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