



# The Holy See

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**ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI  
TO H.E. Mr JOSEPH WETERINGS  
NEW AMBASSADOR OF THE KINGDOM OF THE NETHERLANDS  
TO THE HOLY SEE**

*Friday, 21 October 2011*

*Your Excellency,*

In welcoming you to the Vatican and accepting the Letters of Credence by which you are appointed Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of the Kingdom of the Netherlands to the Holy See, I wish first of all to express my gratitude to you for transmitting the courteous greeting of Her Majesty Queen Beatrix, and I would ask you kindly to reciprocate and to convey, in turn, my good wishes to her, as well as my appreciation of the cordial relations existing between the Holy See and your country.

Bilateral relations between a nation-state and the Holy See are clearly of a different character from those between nation-states. The Holy See is not an economic or military power. Yet as you yourself have indicated, its moral voice exerts considerable influence around the world. Among the reasons for this is precisely the fact that the Holy See's moral stance is unaffected by the political or economic interests of a nation-state or the electoral concerns of a political party. Its contribution to international diplomacy consists largely in articulating the ethical principles that ought to underpin the social and political order, and in drawing attention to the need for action to remedy violations of such principles. It does so, evidently, from the standpoint of the Christian faith, but as I observed in my recent address to the German Parliament, Christianity has always pointed to reason and nature as the sources of the norms on which a state of law should be built ([Address to the Bundestag](#), 22 September 2011). Hence the diplomatic dialogue in which the Holy See engages is conducted neither on confessional nor on pragmatic grounds but on the basis of universally applicable principles that are as real as the physical elements of the natural environment.

In acting as a voice for the voiceless and defending the rights of the defenceless, including the poor, the sick, the unborn, the elderly, and the members of minority groups who suffer unjust discrimination, the Church seeks always to promote natural justice as it is her right and duty to do. While recognizing with humility that her own members do not always live up to the high moral standards that she proposes, the Church cannot do other than continue to urge all people, her own members included, to seek to do whatever is in accordance with justice and right reason and to oppose whatever is contrary.

On this basis, I have no doubt that the Holy See and the Kingdom of the Netherlands have many areas of shared concern. Mr Ambassador, you have spoken of the need to promote global peace through just resolution of conflicts and through opposing the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction. You underlined the need to foster development and to promote self-reliance in emerging countries. You mentioned the generous humanitarian response of the Dutch people when emergency aid is needed around the world. And you spoke of the need to defend human dignity. These and many other areas of international policy will continue to provide opportunities for fruitful exchanges between your country and the Holy See.

I am heartened also by your words about the Dutch Government's intention to promote freedom of religion which, as you know, is a matter of particular concern to the Holy See at the present time. It is threatened not only by legal constraints in some parts of the world, but by an anti-religious mentality within many societies, even those where freedom of religion enjoys the protection of law. It is therefore greatly to be hoped that your Government will be vigilant, so that the freedom of religion and freedom of worship will continue to be protected and promoted, both at home and abroad.

I am likewise encouraged by the steps that the Dutch Government has taken to discourage drug abuse and prostitution. While your nation has long championed the freedom of individuals to make their own choices, nevertheless, those choices by which people inflict harm on themselves or others must be discouraged, for the good of individuals and society as a whole. Catholic social teaching, as you know, places great emphasis on the common good, as well as the integral good of individuals, and care is always needed to discern whether perceived rights are truly in accordance with those natural principles of which I spoke earlier.

With these sentiments, Your Excellency, I offer my best wishes for the success of your mission, and I assure you that the various departments of the Roman Curia are always ready to provide help and support in the fulfilment of your duties. Upon you, your family and all the people of the Kingdom of the Netherlands, I cordially invoke God's abundant blessings.

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