

MEETING WITH THE STAFF
OF THE UNITED NATIONS ORGANIZATION

ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI

New York
Friday, 18 April 2008

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Here, within a small space in the busy city of New York, is housed an Organization with a worldwide mission to promote peace and justice. I am reminded of the similar contrast in scale between Vatican City State and the world in which the Church exercises her universal mission and apostolate. The sixteenth-century artists who painted the maps on the walls of the Apostolic Palace reminded the Popes of the vast extent of the known world. In those frescoes, the Successors of Peter were offered a tangible sign of the immense outreach of the Church's mission at a time when the discovery of the New World was opening up unforeseen horizons. Here in this glass palace, the art on display has its own way of reminding us of the responsibilities of the United Nations Organization. We see images of the effects of war and poverty, we are reminded of our duty to strive for a better world, and we rejoice in the sheer diversity and exuberance of human culture, manifested in the wide range of peoples and nations gathered together under the umbrella of the international community.

On the occasion of my visit, I wish to pay tribute to the invaluable contribution made by the administrative staff and the many employees of the United Nations, who carry out their duties with such great dedication and professionalism every day – here in New York, in other UN centres, and at special missions all over the world. To you, and to those who have gone before you, I would like to express my personal appreciation and that of the whole Catholic Church. We remember especially the many civilians and peace-keepers who have sacrificed their lives in the field for the good of the peoples they serve – in 2007 alone there were forty-two of them. We also remember the vast multitude who dedicate their lives to work that is never sufficiently acknowledged, often in difficult circumstances. To all of you – translators, secretaries, administrative personnel of every kind, maintenance and security staff, development workers, peace-keepers and many others – thank you, most sincerely. The work that you do makes it possible for the Organization to continue exploring new ways of achieving the goals for which it was founded.

The United Nations is often spoken of as the “family of nations”. By the same token, the headquarters here in New York could be described as a home, a place of welcome and concern for the good of family members everywhere. It is an excellent place in which to promote growth in understanding and collaboration between peoples. Rightly, the staff of the United Nations are selected from a wide range of cultures and nationalities. The

personnel here constitute a microcosm of the whole world, in which each individual makes an indispensable contribution from the perspective of his or her particular cultural and religious heritage. The ideals that inspired the founders of this institution need to take shape here and in every one of the Organization's missions around the world in the mutual respect and acceptance that are the hallmarks of a thriving family.

In the internal debates of the United Nations, increasing emphasis is being placed on the "responsibility to protect". Indeed this is coming to be recognized as the moral basis for a government's claim to authority. It is also a feature that naturally appertains to a family, in which stronger members take care of weaker ones. This Organization performs an important service, in the name of the international community, by monitoring the extent to which governments fulfil their responsibility to protect their citizens. On a day-to-day level, it is you who lay the foundations on which that work is built, by the concern you show for one another in the workplace, and by your solicitude for the many peoples whose needs and aspirations you serve in all that you do.

The Catholic Church, through the international activity of the Holy See, and through countless initiatives of lay Catholics, local Churches and religious communities, assures you of her support for your work. I assure you and your families of a special remembrance in my prayers. May Almighty God bless you always and comfort you with his grace and his peace, so that through the care you offer to the entire human family, you can continue to be of service to him.

Thank you.