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Pope Benedict XVI Commends Peace and Accord in Kazakhstan

Pope Benedict XVI received in audience Kazakhstan’s President Nursultan Nazarbayev on November 6, the last day of his visit to the Apennines. The talks, held in friendly atmosphere, highlighted Kazakhstan’s policies of religious tolerance.



Kazakhstan’s President Nursultan Nazarbayev (L) points to a pyramid gift during an audience with Pope Benedict XVI at the Vatican on November 6, 2009.

Photo by Reuters Pictures.

“We are thankful that you had arranged a visit to Kazakhstan by Pope John Paul II in 2001 and also for your efforts in promoting religious freedoms. Let me express my sincere gratitude for the policies of peace and accord, of which Kazakhstan serves as a source,” Pope Benedict XVI told President Nazarbayev as he greeted him at the Vatican last Friday.

As reported by Kazakhstan’s *Khabar* TV, Nursultan Nazarbayev presented the Pope with a model of Palace of Peace and Accord in Astana, which had since 2003 hosted three interreligious congresses. “It is pointed up towards heaven,” the

President noted. “Yes, there reigns harmony,” the Pope replied.

The two leaders noted with satisfaction good relations existing between the Holy See and Astana. They are based on the fact of peaceful coexistence of various religious communities in Kazakhstan. The Pope expressed his hope Kazakhstan’s Roman Catholics would contribute to peace and progress in their host nation.

At the Vatican last week, the President also met Cardinal Secretary Tarcisio Bertone and Archbishop Dominique Mamberti. They discussed the impact of global recession on spiritual life around the world, Kazakhstan’s and other nations’ efforts to promote interreligious dialog and peace, as well new opportunities for such efforts as Astana prepares to take over the OSCE chairmanship in 2010.

Kazakhstan and the Holy See established diplomatic relations in 1992. Nursultan Nazarbayev first visited Vatican in 1998. Following that Kazakhstan became the first nation in CIS and Asia, with whom the Papal authority had signed an Agreement on the relationship.

Of great historical importance for the nation was the visit to Astana by Pope John Paul II in September 2001. The visit took place only a couple of weeks after the infamous terrorist acts of September 11, which impacted negatively the perceptions of Islam in the West. The late Pope’s visit on these dramatic days to a predominantly Muslim nation, although one with an established interreligious peace and harmony, sent a strong message of the need to seek mutual understanding.

Head of OSCE Parliamentary Assembly Supports Summit Next Year

Joao Soares, President of the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly began on November 10 his three day visit to Astana with meetings with President Nursultan Nazarbayev and other top officials.



President of the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly Joao Soares (L) shakes hands with Kazakhstan’s Secretary of State – Foreign Minister Kanat Saudabayev in Astana on November, 10, 2009.

Photo by Stanislav Phillipov.

At a press briefing after meeting with President Nazarbayev in the Ak Orda presidential palace, Soares said the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly had long been in favour of Kazakhstan’s candidacy to chair the organization.

“I would like to underscore the improvements Kazakhstan has achieved in promoting interreligious tolerance. We also commend Astana’s efforts to strengthen the work of the OSCE in all three baskets of its activities, promoting regional security and struggle against militarization, economic and ecologic development, protection of human rights and encouraging tolerance. I’ve witnessed many chairmanships of various countries in the organization, and I am confident Astana can be a dynamic chairman,” he noted.

Joao Soares also expressed his support of the proposal to hold an OSCE summit in Astana next year. “I commend Kazakhstan’s intentions and efforts to

convene an OSCE summit during its chairmanship. The last summit was held in 1999 in Istanbul, and no meeting [at the top level] has been held for a long period,” he said.

Later on Tuesday, Soares and Secretary General of the Assembly Spencer Oliver met chairmen of both chambers of the Parliament, as well as Secretary of State - Foreign Minister Kanat Saudabayev.

“Throughout its history the OSCE has proven it is one the most efficient international organizations, and keeps good balance between its modest budget and significant results of its activities. Without any discrimination the organization has demonstrated its value to countries both east and west of Vienna. The OSCE has played a particularly positive role in the Balkans, where it facilitated establishing peace and reconciliation of combatants,” Joao Soares stated in his speech at a meeting with members of the Kazakh parliament.

At a meeting with Chairman of Senate Kassym-Zhomart Tokayev, who is also a Vice-President of OSCE Parliamentary Assembly, the two sides discussed the agenda of Kazakhstan’s forthcoming chairmanship in the organization. Chairman Tokayev informed his guest of Kazakhstan’s proposal to host a comprehensive conference on tolerance next year.

Ural Mukhamedzhanov, Chairman of the Majjilis (lower house of Parliament), informed the delegation that Astana had defined major priorities of its upcoming chairmanship.

“We’ll pay great attention to the countries east to Vienna [headquarters of the OSCE]. Kazakhstan will continue to take measures aimed at enhancing the organization’s efficiency. We also attach great importance to the functioning of the security system in Europe and the potential role of OSCE in advancing post-conflict reconstruction in Afghanistan,” Chairman Mukhamedzhanov stated.

Following a meeting with Secretary Saudabayev, Soares commended Kazakhstan’s preparations for its OSCE mission next year and called the country’s policies to promote inter-religious harmony a regional example.

‘This is the President Speaking’

President Nursultan Nazarbayev will answer as many questions from the country’s citizens as possible on November 13, 2009. This year the people of Kazakhstan have the opportunity to ask questions through a hotline, SMS and two websites, the official one at www.akorda.kz and a specially created one at www.line.gov.kz.

This will be the third time the President will interact with the people in this format. In 2005, it was done through a live broadcast on TV. In 2007, it was an online conference in the Internet. This year, all the possibilities of modern communication channels will be combined, including the Internet, landline telephones and mobile communications. The conference organizers expect it to take several hours, depending on the activity of the population.

During the conference, Nazarbayev will answer the most popular inquiries. As of know, 16,000 questions were collected, listed on the websites. People can vote for their favourite questions on the two websites mentioned above. Each question has its own unique number, which allows the inquirer to find out whether the answer has been received.

As of Tuesday morning, the most popular issue raised by people is the price of Internet providers in Kazakhstan. Many users believe prices for the services are unreasonably high.

Many citizens inquire about the President’s views on the ways to solve problems of mortgage loans. They are afraid developers may fail to complete construction of residential facilities due to the current difficulties in the industry.

Another urgent problem concerns availability of space in kindergartens. With the recent sharp increase in birth rate and closure of many such facilities back in the 1990s, the number of currently available kindergartens, especially in the booming city of Astana, is clearly insufficient.

People have also actively voted for questions about a unified national school test, launched five years ago. Many schoolchildren and their parents complain about the quality of questions and tasks in the test, despite the perpetual work to improve it.

Numerous citizens also express their interest in learning the Kazakh language and ask the President on where they can find government-run facilities to study.

As usual for this kind of conferences, there are a number of curious requests. Somebody asks for a computer, another person asks for a car and one young man asks to support the development of hip-hop movement in Kazakhstan.

Some citizens were wondering about things such as the President's school years and his preferred cuisine. Many use the upcoming conference to send words of gratitude to the President, reflecting his strong popularity.

Most questions are coming from the nation's most populous regions - Astana, Almaty, South Kazakhstan, Almaty and Qaraghandy oblasts. Foreigners also ask questions of Nursultan Nazarbayev, including people in Russia and Uzbekistan. They are mostly interested in rules of legal stay in Kazakhstan, documentation needed for that, and possible measures to ease the procedures. Several questions came from the United States and Mongolia.

Answers to questions that are not articulated during the conference, will be prepared by the relevant government authorities in a few weeks following the event on November 13.

Government to Expand Support for Young Talents

Kanat Saudabayev, Kazakhstan's Secretary of State – Minister of Foreign Affairs met young talented representatives of the world of culture today at the Ak Orda presidential residence, urging them to serve as examples for the country's youngsters and promote patriotism.

“Since the first days of Kazakhstan's independence, President Nursultan Nazarbayev has attached great importance to supporting culture. Today, we see a true revival and blossoming of



Botagoz and Bolat Tynybekov, a sister and a brother, study in London under the Bolashak scholarship.

Photo by Vladimir Tretyakov

our culture, literature and the arts. Supporting creative youth will remain the state's most important priority,” Saudabayev said at the meeting. About two dozen winners and laureates of various international art festivals participated in the event.

Among specific projects which provide such support is the “Cultural Heritage” program, leading to the expansion in the network of cultural institutions, and the Bolashak program which offers presidential scholarships to gifted youth to study at best foreign universities, including in relation to the arts. Kazakh

students already graduated from the Royal Academy of Arts in London, the Columbia College in Chicago and the Vienna Conservatory.

Saudabayev said Kazakhstan's capital of Astana has turned into a “major cultural centre” with its National Opera and Ballet Theatre after Baiseitova, the National Academy of Music, concert halls, and a soon to be opened new University of Arts.

The government supports both the Kazakh culture and language, and the cultures of other ethnic groups living in Kazakhstan. There are 33 nation-wide print media published in 15 languages of those spoken in the country. TV programs are made in 11 languages. In addition to Kazakh and Russian theatres, there are a Uighur, a Korean, a German, and an Uzbek theatre in Kazakhstan.

Additionally, the government distributes cash awards to young performers under various programs, supports their participation in major international festivals which already brings positive results.

As he pledged continued state support for the arts, Kanat Saudabayev also spoke of the importance of encouraging business sponsorship of the arts.

“Throughout centuries, arts flourished where there was sponsorship from the rich people. So far, the main and most important sponsor is the state which is increasing the financing for this sphere annually,” he said, instructing relevant ministries to find ways of stimulating private sponsorship, as well as to find other ways to support talented youth.

Speaking at the event, Amirzhan Bisengaliyev, a violinist, who recently graduated from the Royal Academy of Music in London and now teaches at a national school for musically gifted youngsters, expressed his hope for wider public attention to classical music in Kazakhstan. He said the state should support opening of a relevant FM radio station to popularize such music.

Anna Petrakova, an artist, has called for more training sessions abroad as well as for organizing master classes in-country. She also believes authorities can offer artists and sculptors special venues to show their art, such as parks and alleys. “Passing a law on sponsorship would have supported not only famous, but young authors as well,” she said.

Other speakers also spoke of the need for the government to create all necessary conditions for young people to try their best in the arts.

Government-Run Program Encourages Farmers to Raise More Livestock (In-kind credits, or rather, in-sheep credits come to rural communities)

Farmers in East Kazakhstan and Pavlodar regions have become participants in a pilot project named “Zhailau” and developed by the “Ertis” Social-Entrepreneurial Corporation (SEC). The project is about distributing sheep to the people as in-kind credits. Each farmer is encouraged to have a flock of up to one hundred sheep.

Farmers can place their houses under mortgage to obtain loans. Participants are also



required to insure the animals. The amount of insurance is estimated at 90 KZT (KZT 150 = US \$1) per sheep.

In five years, program participants are expected to raise a flock of 600 animals, which, after deducting 200 sheep (a return of a hundred sheep, plus the “interest”), would remain in the property of the tenant. Everything that farmer gets from an animal (fur, meat, hides) is his

net profit and doesn't need to be returned. An estimated net profit of “Ertis” SEC within the next five years is 70 million KZT. The

Photo by Foreign Ministry.

company's specialists estimate each tenant in five years could receive a cash income of more than four million KZT.

The “Zhailau” Program is scheduled to last till 2014. “Ertis” SEC developed it based on a similar program in China, which was revised to fit local realities. Its goal is to stimulate growth of livestock and support rural population. The program's cost during the pilot phase is assessed at 100 million KZT, equally distributed between the two participant regions, East Kazakhstan and Pavlodar. The program is open to rural residents with no sufficient initial capital. Pilot projects have been launched in the village of Kainar in East Kazakhstan and in the village of Akkol in Pavlodar oblast. Each village saw 1,000 heads of cattle distributed to the local farmers.

Social-Entrepreneurial Corporations (SEC) are government-run regional companies, which arrange joint business projects between regional authorities and private companies with a special

focus on SMEs. There are now seven such corporations, which operate in all regions in Kazakhstan. Businesses are encouraged to form partnerships with them as a way to lighten burden of administrative procedures. The corporations are expected to invest half their income in development of non-primary industries and the other half in fulfilling low-profit socially oriented activities in the regions of their responsibility.

Also in the News

- President Nazarbayev sent his condolences to the families of 16 victims of a huge fire on Monday evening, which destroyed a stockpile owned by the “Transit-Service Ltd” on the outskirts of Astana. He tasked the Prime Minister and the Prosecutor General with investigating reasons of the tragedy and finding the ones guilty in it (if any), and the Ministry of Emergencies with liquidating the fire’s consequences. Astana City authorities were instructed to provide assistance to the families of victims, which included four Russian citizens.
- Prime Minister Sergei Sidorsky of Belarus visited Astana on November 9. In a meeting with his Kazakh counterpart, Karim Massimov, he discussed the pressing issues of cooperation on bilateral and multilateral levels, and the ongoing work on implementing 37 joint projects in agriculture, pharmaceuticals, and new technologies. Later on Monday, Sergey Sidorsky was received by President Nazarbayev, who is due to travel to Minsk later this month, both for an official visit and participation in a EurAsEC summit.
- Kazakhstan’s Ministry of Industry and Trade informed last week of its ongoing negotiations with two of the world’s leading retailers - Auchan and IKEA - on their entrance to the Kazakh market. “While supporting domestic retailers, we also invite international companies, which would bring not only investments but also European quality of services, as well as healthy competition, which is good for consumers,” Chairman of the Ministry’s Committee of Commerce Aidar Kazybayev told journalists.
- The Kazakhstan team took the third place in unofficial team standings at the 3rd Asian Indoor Games, which closed in Hanoi, Vietnam, last Sunday, following China and the host nation. The Kazakh sportsmen won 21 gold, 16 silver and 21 bronze medals at the competition. Also in the sports news, on November 7, Kazakhstan’s Andrey Golubev won the President’s Cup in Astana, a tournament of ATP Challenger Tour. In the final game he defeated his Ukrainian opponent Ilya Marchenko, 6:3, 6:3.

Things to Watch

- Slovenia’s President Danilo Turk is in Astana on November 11-12 for an official visit. The negotiations between the two countries’ presidents, signing a number of documents on bilateral collaboration, a Kazakh-Slovenian business forum, and President Turk’s lecture at a university are scheduled.
- On November 11, Kazakhstan’s Red Crescent Society holds public hearings in Astana on the organization’s role in reducing vulnerability of the population to medical and social problems. The event aims to inform participants about the international movement of Red Cross and Red Crescent societies, and its 2009 global campaign under the motto of “Our world. Your move”. Representatives from the Parliament, ministries, international organizations, diplomatic corps, private companies, and news media will attend.
- On November 13, Almaty will host an International Forum titled “Regional integration and economic partnership in Central Asia: an open dialogue of cooperation.” The purpose of the forum is to inform the public about the benefits of regional integration, as well as study Kazakhstan’s initiative to establish a Union of Central Asian states. The forum is to be organized in several sections including 1) motivation for integration, the basis of economic security and protecting national interests in Central Asia; 2) the problem of water-energy cooperation between Central Asian countries; 3) the prospects for regional

trade and economic, investment and scientific technical cooperation in Central Asia in the post-crisis period; and 4) cultural and humanitarian relations in Central Asia. Forum is to be held in the format of the meeting of experts, focusing on the economic aspects of integration. Representatives of the scientific community, experts of Central Asia, Russia and other countries are invited to take part in the event.



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