

ADDRESS
delivered by
H.E. Archbishop Dr. Peter Stephan ZURBRIGGEN
Apostolic Nuncio in Austria
Doyen of the Diplomatic Corps

at the NEW YEAR'S RECEPTION
given by Federal President Dr. Heinz FISCHER

(Vienna, 15th January 2013)

Unofficial Translation

Your Excellency, Dear Mr. Federal President Fischer,

The beginning of a new year is always a splendid opportunity for exchanging a host of good wishes. Hence, in my capacity as Doyen of the Diplomatic Corps accredited to the Republic of Austria, it is again my honour and pleasure to find myself here, amidst the splendour of the Hofburg's Ceremonial Hall, to respectfully present to you, Mr. Federal President, our sincere and heartfelt best wishes for the coming year in a spirit of esteem and appreciation. As the Ambassadors accredited here in Vienna we would like to wish you, the members of the Austrian Government and the entire Austrian population God's bountiful Blessings, peace, success, happiness and joyous prosperity for the year 2013!

Mr. Federal President, Ladies and Gentlemen, Looking back over the past year brings to mind achievements and opportunities missed, hopes and disappointments. I am not called upon at this juncture to elaborate exhaustively on details. Moreover, the media mostly confront us with dreadful news: of natural disasters, manmade tragedies such as the economic and financial crisis, wars, persecutions and mass expulsion. You yourself, Mr. President, have pointed out the "*strengths and weaknesses of the present time*" in your New Year's address and have recalled several fundamental principles that may make a contribution to solving the problems. These principles are: "*personal integrity, the rule of law, human rights, fairness and justice*" (cf. New Year's Address 2013 by the Austrian Federal President Dr. Heinz Fischer, quote translated from German).

In his message for the World Day of Peace, the Holy Father appealed to all people of good will to act as peacemakers, for: "*Our times, marked by globalization with its positive and negative aspects, as well as the continuation of violent conflicts and threats of war, demand a new, shared commitment in pursuit of the common good and the development of all men, and of the whole man.*" (Pope Benedict XVI: Message for the Celebration of the World Day of Peace 2013, Section 1).

Mr. Federal President, Ladies and Gentlemen, Permit me to take a look back into history: in 313 AD, the Emperors Constantine and Licinius promulgated the Edict of Milan, thus permitting Christians and members of other religions to freely practice their faith in the Roman Empire. Much to our regret we find that 1700 years later "*religious persecution against Christians and other minorities in various places*" persists, as His All Holiness the Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew I put it in his Christmas message (Kathpress, 22 Dec. 2012).

In this connection, I would like to recall that 65 years ago, on 10 December 1948, the "General Declaration of Human Rights" was adopted by the United Nations General Assembly at the *Palais de Chaillot* in Paris. This charter of human rights represents the explicit commitment of the United Nations to the general principles of human rights as a basis of humanitarian international law. The charter also makes explicit reference to religious freedom as a central human right.

I would like to single out two of the remarkable events we witnessed in the past year: the "100th Anniversary of the Legal Recognition of Islam by Law in Austria" and the solemn inauguration, here in Vienna on 26 November, of the King Abdullah Bin Abdulaziz International Centre for Interreligious and Intercultural Dialogue (KAICIID) by the Foreign Minister of Saudi Arabia, HRH Prince Saud Al Faisal Al Saud. We all hope that this international organization will serve as a stable and permanent international platform for the dialogue between the world religions. Austria, and particularly Vienna, a city where numerous international organizations have their headquarters, will be enriched by this new centre. It fits well within Austria's great tradition as a pivotal hub of international dialogue and peace.

The award of the Nobel Peace Prize to the European Union in Oslo was received with great pleasure but has also given rise to some pensive reflection. This prestigious award can certainly be seen as recognition of achievements toward European integration. As the President of the European Council Herman Van Rompuy rightly underlined: "*At a time of uncertainty, this day reminds people across Europe and the world of the Union's fundamental purpose: to further the fraternity between European nations, now and in the future.*" (Die Welt, 11 Dec. 2012).

Mr. Federal President, Ladies and Gentlemen, As we are all aware, 2013 has been designated as the “European Year of Citizens” by the EU. I trust you will permit me, as someone hailing from Switzerland, to state how deeply I am convinced of the fundamental importance of civic awareness. Hence, I am delighted to note that this year the European Union is giving prominence to informing its citizens of their rights and duties and the possibilities open to them as EU citizens.

Moreover, 2013 also sees Ireland opening a new EU Trio Presidency together with Lithuania and Greece. I presume I am speaking on behalf of everyone present when I extend the very best wishes for a successful presidency to our colleagues in these three states. As we know there will be important items up for decision in the near future, including the adoption of the next Multiannual Financial Framework of the EU (for the years 2014-2020).

This is also the context in which I take note of the 50th anniversary of the “Élysée Treaty” of 22 January 1963, signed by General de Gaulle and the German Federal Chancellor Konrad Adenauer. To this very day, the Treaty has remained the foundation of Franco-German friendship and co-operation. We also await with great anticipation an important conference to be held here in Vienna: the 5th Global Forum of the United Nations Alliance of Civilisations which will look into the issue of *Promoting responsible Leadership in Diversity and Dialogue*. And, last but not least, 2013 will also bring important elections for Austria.

Unfortunately, the world economy is still marked by weak growth. This does not augur well, particularly for the poorest of countries. Hence efforts aimed at development co-operation must not falter and need to be carried forward in a targeted manner.

Given the numerous and many-faceted problems of which we are all conscious, we have to ask ourselves how we can arrive at good and just solutions for them. The French chronicler of society Antoine de Rivarol (1753-1801) once made this very succinct statement: “*Only the heart will give human beings the right measure*” (Antoine de Rivarol: *Vom Menschen*. Ed. and transl. by U. Kunzmann, Berlin 2012). Let us be guided by “the right measure”, so that we may gather inner strength and harness creative energies that will assist us in overcoming fears of the future and in building a new solidarity among peoples and religious confessions. This will help us to shift our mindset from concern to mutual trust in order to “*build a world marked by more justice, brotherliness and human dignity, in which wars, enmities and discord have no place*” (Pope Benedict XVI.: *Angelus*, 1 Jan. 2013). Hence, the only way forward is staked out by “*mutual consideration, mutual respect, mutual understanding and the will to solve problems and accept challenges together*” (Vice President of the European Parliament Othmar Karas).

Mr. Federal President, Ladies and Gentlemen, In conclusion let me take this festive opportunity to express, on behalf of all my colleagues, our deeply-felt gratitude for the opportunity to live in such a beautiful country – “land of mountains – land of cathedrals” (as the Austrian national anthem puts it) – and exercise our responsible duties in this environment. This is not self-evident, given the situation in today’s world. Here in Austria and in Vienna we are offered a wealth of unique and enriching experiences. Let me just mention a few initiatives: the Alpbach Forum, the European Forum Wachau, the Vienna Lectures organised by the Mayor of the federal capital, the many events held at the Diplomatic Academy and, by way of example, an interesting bilateral project uniting Austria and Mexico: the ancient Mexican feather headdress – called *Penacho* –, which was presented to the public at large at the Museum of Ethnology in Vienna. Vienna is the city of culture and music, and in this regard I feel prompted, again on behalf of all my colleagues, to express heartfelt thanks to the Society of the Friends of Music in Vienna. Every year, the Society makes the Director’s box available to bilateral Ambassadors accredited in Vienna for concerts in the Golden Hall. Thank you so much!

Dear Mr. Federal President, At the beginning of this new year, let me assure you once more, on behalf of my colleagues in the Diplomatic Corps and in my own name, of our sincere and heartfelt gratitude for the support provided to us in the exercise of our mission by the Republic of Austria, and particularly by the Federal Ministry for European and International Affairs!

In conclusion let me extend

- to you, highly esteemed Mr. Federal President, your wife, your family and your entire staff,
- to the members of the Austrian Federal Government and particularly to the very distinguished Federal Minister for European and International Affairs, his family and his staff,
- and to all Austrians

our very best and sincere wishes for a blessed, peaceful and happy Year 2013.

Thank you very much!