

**ADDRESS**  
**given by**  
**His Excellency Archbishop Dr. Peter Stephan ZURBRIGGEN**  
**Apostolic Nuncio to Austria**  
**Doyen of the Diplomatic Corps**

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

**(Vienna, 12 January 2010)**

Unofficial Translation

Your Excellency,  
Dear Mr. Federal President!

At the start of this New Year, the members of the Diplomatic Corps accredited to the Republic of Austria are greatly honoured to express here at the Hofburg their highest regard and sincere wishes to you, Mr. President, for the twelve months before us. For me personally it is a great pleasure to be able for the first time to speak to you on behalf of my esteemed colleagues, the ambassadors representing the heads of state and governments of their countries and, ultimately, their peoples, here in Vienna. From our heart we wish you and the entire people of Austria peace, happiness, many blessings and well-being in 2010!

In our capacity as diplomats we particularly perceive ourselves embedded in the community of our peoples as well as all peoples, and we are therefore especially sensitive to the experience of history progressing along the flow of time. But it would be inadequate to see history only as a temporal sequence of events. Such a view is highly superficial considering that each individual's history is interwoven with that of their people and, ultimately, that of the world. It fails to perceive the purpose and object of history and would furthermore make us unable to draw conclusions for a better future of humankind and its peoples. Our view of history incorporates experiences of beauty as much as failure, of the unexpected and unfulfilled, of reason and frustration in political acts and omissions, of happiness and tragedy of human life in its individual or communal dimension. Since we are part of history and do not stand above it, it does not befit us to make a final judgement. Yet, enquiring about the quite complex links between freedom and the need for human and political action causes us to make valuations, which must be kept free of ideologies so as to prevent any distortions in our perception.

Dear Mr. President, Ladies and Gentlemen: Looking back at what is past is inevitably tied to looking forward to what is before us. We are looking back at a year when we gratefully remembered the fall of the Berlin wall 20 years ago, and the dismantling of the Iron Curtain that had cruelly dissected Europe. Many of us participated in commemoration ceremonies which, as we know, had a particular importance in this country. The freedom-loving and human-rights respecting international community expresses its gratitude and respect to Austria. And history teaches us: what once appeared to be almost impossible has, in retrospect, been found to be almost inevitable!

Our review of 2009 is necessarily restricted to a few items only.

Same as in other countries pervaded by a high degree of environmental awareness, the outcome of the Copenhagen Climate Conference met with disappointment in Austria. Expectations, also in Austria, of “binding benchmarks with clear reduction targets” for CO<sub>2</sub> emissions were not met – even though everybody was aware that “climate change does not know any maps” (Federal Minister N. Berlakovich). What is left is the hope that the states will accelerate their efforts in a field which, after all, concerns all of the human race.

In this connection please allow me to remind you that His Holiness Pope Benedict XVI placed his message to the 43<sup>rd</sup> World Day of Peace under the motto: “*If you want to cultivate peace, protect creation.*” In this message, the Holy Father urgently calls for sincere “intergenerational solidarity” (para 8). For him, the contemporary ecological crisis offers “an historic opportunity to develop a common plan of action aimed at orienting the model of global development towards greater respect for creation and for an integral human development” (para 9).

Emphasis also needs to be given to Austria’s contribution as a non-standing member of the United Nations Security Council for two years, and its presidency in November 2009. Michael Spindelegger, Federal Minister for European and International Affairs, in his *National Statement* (of 11 November 2009), pointed out the priority of protecting the civil population in the peacekeeping missions carried out by UN forces and, quite rightly, reminded his audience that violations of humanitarian rules and of the human rights in the course of armed conflict must be punished internationally. It is to be greatly wished that international law will not just progress in this direction but also gain greater effectivity.

As diplomats stationed in Vienna we have been able to find that the development of the European Union in recent years has offered Austria an opportunity to move towards the centre of a united Europe and, in the spirit of its historical mission, to actively contribute to a central and eastern European space of peace, security and prosperity. A commitment specifically related to the Danube region is in the natural interest of Austria and its neighbouring states. Evidence for how deeply this wonderful country is rooted in a solid Christian-humanist tradition is found in its politics which pursues not just economic and energy objectives but similarly values very stringent human-rights and social standards and keeps the protection of minorities in its view.

Dear Mr. President, in your New Year’s address to the Austrian population you pleaded for a “productive and humane society” in which social equity and the economic performance principle must not be played off against each other. We are all convinced that the economy must not be seen as being “antisocial” and morally neutral, but is required to consider the fundamental ethic principles of human life and activity.

On behalf of my colleagues from the Diplomatic Corps and in my own name I want to express our thanks for the support granted by the Republic of Austria in carrying out our mission.

I am very pleased to renew our best wishes for a blessed and happy year 2010

to you, dear Mr. President and to your family,  
to the esteemed Federal Minister for European and International Affairs,  
and to all citizens of Austria.

Thank you.