



**Conference of His Excellency, Archbishop Paul Richard Gallagher  
Secretary for Relations with States of the Holy See**

“The diplomacy of the Holy See and its commitment to the peace and dignity of the human person, with particular attention to the Caucasus region”

State University “Ivane Javakhishvili”  
Tbilisi, Georgia  
23 October 2018, 11:00

Your Excellencies,  
Esteemed university, political and religious authorities,  
Distinguished Ambassadors, ladies and gentlemen, dear students,

On the occasion of this official visit to Georgia, I am pleased to accept the invitation to meet with the academic community of this prestigious University, as well as with all the distinguished guests, including political and religious authorities, as well as the members of the Diplomatic Corps accredited in this country. At the beginning of this conference, wherein I will offer some reflections on the commitment of papal diplomacy to promote peace and human dignity, with particular attention to the Caucasus region, I wish to extend to you all the cordial greetings of Pope Francis, who, as you will recall, in 2016 made a visit to your country, calling it a “blessed land, a place of encounter and vital exchange among cultures and civilizations, which... discovered in Christianity its deepest identity and the solid foundation of its values” (Address to the meeting with the Authorities, the Civil Society and the Diplomatic Corps, Tbilisi, 30 September 2016).

Today, we find ourselves at this prestigious university in Georgia, the first state university of the whole Caucasus region, which this year celebrates the centenary of its foundation. This important occasion coincides with another significant anniversary that involves the entire nation, namely, the Centenary of the Declaration of Independence of the first Georgian Democratic Republic, after the fall of the Russian Empire. From that moment on, the dream of Georgians to regain the full freedom of their old homeland, no longer dependent on foreign powers, found its first expression, which unfortunately, as everyone knows, did not last too long. On 25 February 1921, only three years after having regained sovereignty and a few days after the approval of a new constitution, the eleventh division of the Soviet Army occupied Tbilisi. The Prime Minister, Noe Zhordania, together with some members of the legitimate government, the Representatives of the Constitutional Assembly and military officers with their families fled to Turkey aboard a French ship headed to Paris, from where they would never return (see Ketevan Andguladze, European Dream, in *Osservatore Romano*, 15.06.2018, p.8). The breath of freedom would regain its full force only in the 1990s, after the fall of the new empire, built on the ashes of the previous one.

Turning to the significance of this hall of the University Museum, which pays tribute to the important anniversary of independence, we should not forget that among the founding fathers of this university there was the famous chemist and member of the Academies of the Sciences in different countries, Prof. Petre Melikishvili, a Georgian Catholic, who was elected as the first Rector of this University. He is one of the many witnesses to the role played by Georgian Catholics in the history of this country. Allow me also to mention the figure of Father Micheil Tamarashvili, a Georgian Catholic priest and important historian of Georgia, as well as many of his confreres, including priests Petre Kharischarishvili, Dmitri Tumanishvili, and the Antonishvili brothers and Antoni Glakhashvili. We recall as well one of the most important Georgian composers, Zacharia Paliashvili, also a Catholic, founder of the Georgian national opera, author of the work *Daisi*, whose music partly inspired the Georgian national anthem. The names

of these and many other Georgian Catholics are recorded with distinction in the annals of this nation.

I would now like to move to the topic of papal diplomacy, which for centuries has accompanied the action of the Popes in favour of peace and the common good.

## 1. PONTIFICAL DIPLOMACY AT THE SERVICE OF PEACE

It may be said without hesitation that the diplomacy of the Holy See is a diplomacy of peace. This flows from its very nature which is deeply rooted in its service to the cause of humanity, of every person and of “the whole person”, without discrimination or differences, as well as in its promotion of human dignity and integral development, as is also clearly taught in the Gospel, the Divine Word that becomes a universal message to humanity. The person who walks on the roads of the world, contributing to the development of the common good of humanity, is ultimately destined to live forever in peace with himself, with others and with God. This religious and Christian vision, devoid of individual interests, revenge, aggression or blackmail, constitutes a peaceful and universal *leitmotiv* for every action of the Catholic Church and its institutions in the contemporary world and therefore of its diplomacy, always committed to the common good of people and society. It also becomes, throughout the course of history, a message increasingly purified from the imperfections and errors experienced along the troubled path of human history.

All this translates concretely into the fact that papal diplomacy has no concern for worldly power: neither political, nor economic, nor ideological. It is not a diplomacy similar to that of States which pursue of their own interests – political, economic, military, territorial, ideological – seeking influence and alliances, while promoting their own culture, art, cooking, and so on. Papal diplomacy, on the contrary, while enjoying a well-established position in the family of nations, which is also historically guaranteed by the status of the Holy See as a subject of international law, is above all a diplomacy of the Universal Church, which embraces all nations that are

open to supreme values freedom, human rights and the promotion of the common good. Since it is not linked to another civil state, it does not depend on any temporal power. The Holy See has a territorial base in the Vatican City State, the smallest state in the world, comprised of 44 hectares, which is, in the words of the Preamble of the Vatican Fundamental Law, a *functional* State that exists as “a suitable guarantee of the freedom of the Apostolic See and as a means of ensuring the real and visible independence of the Roman Pontiff in the exercise of His mission in the world”.

For this reason, the diplomacy of the Holy See can, with the greater freedom, explain to one side the position of the other and can warn both against the dangers that come from a self-referential world vision. It may seem paradoxical, but it is certainly true, that the Holy See does not seek anything for itself. It does not manoeuvre now here, now there, so as to not to lose anywhere. From a human perspective, the goal of papal diplomacy is nearly impossible to achieve, but from the perspective of the Gospel, it is an imperative. It acts in order that neighbouring countries return to dialogue and cease to be torn apart by hatred even before the launching of bombs (see Gianfranco Brunelli, Interview with Cardinal Pietro Parolin: Moscow and Beijing, in *Regno attualità*, 15.07.2017, page 385).

The world of today faces different types of conflicts – direct wars, proxy wars, civil wars, hybrid wars, frozen or postponed wars –, which sooner or later become transnational conflicts. This situation of great uncertainty, which with the involvement of large, medium and small players, bearers of different and often conflicting interests, leads to a “global” conflict, reflects well the idea of the “third world war fought piecemeal”, of which Pope Francis often speaks. At times, the geopolitical situation is so fragmented and polarized, and the bonds so badly damaged, that any adjustment becomes extremely difficult. We should not forget that many conflicts are supported and fed by illicit flows of arms and money. How can any country claim to be behaving correctly when it continues to supply the parties in conflict with weapons? Pope Francis raised this very issue when addressing the Congress of the United States of America (24.09.2015): “Being at the service of dialogue and peace also means being truly

determined to minimize and, in the long term, to end the many armed conflicts throughout our world. Here we have to ask ourselves: Why are deadly weapons being sold to those who plan to inflict untold suffering on individuals and society? Sadly, the answer, as we all know, is simply for money: money that is drenched in blood, often innocent blood. In the face of this shameful and culpable silence, it is our duty to confront the problem and to stop the arms trade”.

If it is true that weapons make conflicts possible, it is also true that every war, even the so-called creeping conflicts, are accompanied by tragic consequences: refugees, destruction, poverty, hunger and decline, all of which lead to the absence of social order, development and peace. The Holy See affirms, and Pope Francis strongly reminds us, that diplomacy must rediscover its role as a bearer of solidarity between persons and societies as an alternative to weapons, violence and terror. Diplomacy must be at the service of promoting dialogue, cooperation and reconciliation, which replaces mutual recriminations, fratricidal opposition, and the representation of others as the enemy. In fact, diplomacy must be able to replace the threat of the use of force with mutual and open dialogue. The challenge is always to facilitate a better common understanding between the parties who risk presenting themselves as two incompatible opposites. Engaging in dialogue is already in itself a positive step, which opens up one to the other and increases trust.

In this regard, speaking of diplomacy in the service of peace, Pope Francis has introduced some new elements concerning the capacities and personal behaviour of those who, as diplomats, are called to be artisans of peace. With reference to St. Paul, the Apostle of the Gentiles, the Pope asks that every act be accompanied by humility, gentleness and magnanimity, because “we cannot promote peace without humility. Where there is pride, there is always war, always the desire to overcome the other, to think oneself superior. Without humility there is no peace and without peace there is no unity” (cf., Pope Francis, Homily at Santa Marta, 21.10.2016). It is a good lesson for those (including ourselves) who every day are engaged in the sphere of international relations.

## 2. PAPAL DIPLOMACY AT THE SERVICE OF THE HUMAN PERSON

By putting man at the centre of its activity, papal diplomacy seeks to pursue its calling to rise above all particular interests and to speak to every person who is concerned about the search for peace and development and respect for human rights. This approach is in strict relation to the mission of the Catholic Church itself, which is not limited to only one people or any particular culture, language or tradition, but carries a universal message addressed to the whole world. Precisely due to this “impartiality” with respect to different places and cultures, papal diplomacy is particularly appreciated by various national, regional and international actors, because, as we have mentioned, having no self-interest, it can more easily become a mediator and interlocutor of all.

This year the international community celebrates the 70th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. This occasion offers the Holy See the opportunity to reaffirm its commitment to the service of the human person, of our intrinsic dignity, from which derive our fundamental rights. Indeed, the nature of the human person is the foundation of every right. That nobility which man has because of his very nature; that respect which he, conscious of his own value on the moral plane, senses towards himself and is able to translate into right behaviour; and that honour and decorum which confer on each human being a character capable of respect for the other; this is precisely what we commonly call the dignity of the human person, of every human person! The Church cannot but defend human dignity, because it is an inherent and fundamental part of the Christian vision, according to which it is God himself that bestows on every person this dignity. Pope Benedict XVI, in his speech at the United Nations on 18 April 2008, recalled, in fact, that the Universal Declaration of Human Rights is “the outcome of a convergence of different religious and cultural traditions, all of them motivated by the common desire to place the human person at the heart of institutions, laws and the workings of society, and to consider the human person essential for the world of culture, religion and science”. The Universal

Declaration of Human Rights is founded upon an anthropocentric vision that is shared and promoted by the Catholic Church.

In this sense, papal diplomacy commits itself to respect not only the “political and civil” rights of man, but also the “economic, social and cultural” rights that are simultaneously affirmed in the abovementioned Universal Declaration. It is about protecting the human person in every aspect, through what the social doctrine of the Catholic Church calls “integral human development”. As I had the opportunity to point out at the Council of Europe in Strasbourg last month, on the occasion of a celebration of the 70th anniversary of the Universal Declaration, “integral human development” has two meanings. On the one hand, it means “giving priority to all human beings in a situation of weakness, at risk of being simply discarded, from the poor to the unemployed, from migrants to young people without education, from women victims of violence, to the elderly who live in solitude, to the unborn, to the disabled. It is an attention that is expressed in the wide range of charitable and social commitments that the Catholic Church and Catholic NGOs continue to assume in the world”. Indeed, this also happens here in Georgia, where the important role of *Caritas Georgia* has for years been recognized and, hopefully, appreciated. On the other hand, “integral human development” also means the “development of the whole person”, that is to say “of the human person in all its dimensions: beginning with the basic needs of survival, the right to education, the possibility of participating in community life, the need to live freely their faith and their beliefs”. In this way, by serving the cause of the human person and promoting his integral development, as described above, the Holy See seeks to offer a contribution to address more effectively the daily challenges that respect for human rights places before the international community.

In the present historical context, in fact, the recognition of the universality of human rights is widely challenged, which places their future in great peril. Among these difficulties, there is the phenomenon of persistent and serious violations of human rights that are witnessed in various parts of the world. These abuses often undermine the effectiveness of the human rights system, which should benefit the good of

humanity and the construction of peace in the world. Unfortunately, as we all know, even the Caucasus Region is not immune to conflicts and the resulting violations of the human rights of which I speak. However, if we start from the recognition that my rights and those of others are interconnected and interdependent, a door may be opened to answering this enormous challenge of our day. In other words, if the dignity and rights of others are ignored or trampled underfoot, then my dignity and my rights too are in danger. Having as a goal the good of every human person, we need to commit ourselves in a spirit of brotherhood, so that the patrimony of human rights, which the international community solemnly proclaimed seventy years ago as the foundation of a new order in the days following the horrors of the war, may continue to show the way forward for the construction of our societies, acting as a necessary point of reference for the correct exercise of political power, and giving direction to the international community.

### 3. PAPAL DIPLOMACY AND GEORGIA

In concrete terms, to speak specifically of this region, the Holy See has given and continues to give particular attention to the Eastern European countries emerging from communism, and thus to the new post-Soviet political order. During the time of the Soviet Union, with its well-known resistance to religious freedom, when communist propaganda presented the Vatican as a bulwark of Western imperialism and the unbridled capitalist spirit that oppressed the working masses, relations between the Holy See and the Caucasus Region were virtually non-existent, apart from some sporadic exceptions. We know that of the main Catholic churches that existed in Georgia until 1921 (two in Tbilisi and others in Kutaisi, Batumi, Gori, Manglisi, Akhalzikhe, Ude, Vale and Arali), only one remained open to the public during the Soviet period, in order to give to the outside world the semblance of “religious freedom” in the Region. It was the Church of the Holy Apostles Peter and Paul in Tbilisi, built by Polish emigrants in 1877, which saved, during communism, the



“remnants” of Georgian Catholicism and played an essential part in its rebirth after the fall of the Berlin Wall.

One could speak at length about the different phases that the Catholic Church in Georgia has experienced in the final decade of the last century and in the following years, marked by the effort to recover the vitality that characterized it in previous centuries and which had been almost completely lost in the seventy years of Soviet domination. Monsignor Giuseppe Pasotto, Monsignor Raphael Minassian and Fr. Benny Yadegar, present with us today, as well as other eyewitnesses, undoubtedly hold many memories of the efforts and challenges they faced daily, not only to give back to the Catholic community the vigour of its past, but also to be active builders of its present and future. We wish them all the best in their daily efforts aimed at the service of faith, communion and peace, for the good not only of the Catholic faithful, but also of the entire Georgian society.

The Holy See has followed with particular attention both the political and religious events of the Caucasus, being always open to ecumenical dialogue with the Georgian Patriarchate. The historic visit to the Vatican and the meeting with Pope St. John Paul II of His Holiness Ilia II, Catholicos-Patriarch of all Georgia, that took place on 6 June 1980, remains in the memory of many. After the fall of the Berlin Wall, the first representative of the Holy See in Moscow, the Apostolic Nuncio, Archbishop Francesco Colasuonno, made a series of visits to Georgia in the years 1991-1993, to follow the happenings of the newly reborn Georgian state and of the Catholics who did not own any parish house at the time. The guest from the Vatican had to find lodging with Catholic families or in the modest home of the Eucharist Sisters, who in order to accommodate him would move to the adjoining church of Saints Peter and Paul, where they slept at the foot of the altar.

At the strictly diplomatic level, the Holy See recognized the independence of Georgia from the beginning, having been among the first ten States to open a representation in Tbilisi. On 24 May 1992, the official newspaper of the Holy See simultaneously published the news of the establishment of diplomatic relations

between the Holy See and Georgia, Armenia, Azerbaijan and Moldova. The announcement states: “The Holy See and the Republic of Georgia, wishing to develop amicably their mutual relations, have decided to establish diplomatic relations, at the level of Apostolic Nunciature by the Holy See and of an Embassy by the Republic of Georgia”. The Vatican newspaper also presented a brief history of the country and its past relations with the Holy See (see L’Osservatore Romano, 24.05.1992, pp. 1-2).

Last year we commemorated the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of this significant event, but it is important to remember that the relationship between the Church of Rome and Georgia dates back to ancient times, which certainly should not be reduced only to the last three decades of its rediscovered political freedom. In fact, since the first centuries of the Christian era, the apostolic tradition found a generous welcome in this country. Fortunately, Georgia, even in the midst of many adversities, has jealously preserved those values expressed by its culture, language and traditions, which, as was pointed out by Pope Francis in one of his speeches in Tbilisi, places your “country fully and in a particular way within the bedrock of European civilization” (Address during the meeting with the Authorities, the Civil Society and the Diplomatic Corps, Tbilisi, 30 September 2016).

Scholars find numerous historical testimonies about the exchange of letters between the Roman Pontiffs and the Georgian Kings, including the ancient correspondence of Catholicos Kyrion I, who at the beginning of the seventh century wrote to Pope St. Gregory the Great asking him for religious advice. Relations intensified from the 13th century onward, when, on several occasions, various communities of Catholic religious families, invited by Georgian monarchs or simply traveling to the East, visited Georgia and opened their own houses and places of worship. Initially they were brief missions of Franciscans and Dominicans, then of Jesuits, while much later the orders of the Theatines and Capuchins were warmly welcomed in Georgia. The Vatican archives, in particular those of the Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples, preserve beautiful testimonies of those religious who tell the stories of the Georgian Catholic communities; these remain precious sources of

knowledge of the Georgian culture in the West. To these testimonies may be added those of some young Georgian students of the Pontifical Urban College who, after being ordained priests and having returned to their homeland, became informal “ambassadors” between Georgia and Rome, serving their communities until the persecutions of the Soviet period.

For us today, it is an honour to note that our political and religious relations have lasted for centuries and, even if interrupted several times by historical events when Georgia sadly lost its sovereignty, were always renewed with the grateful memory of the long-lasting fraternity based on common Christian roots. Naturally, we hope that this mutual relationship will grow in strength and flourish with ever greater vigour, for the benefit of your country and of the Holy See, which is represented by the Apostolic Nuncio in his capacity as Ambassador and Dean of the Diplomatic Corps and which embraces the local Catholic community in its three rites: Latin, Armenian and Chaldean. Georgian Catholics, being Georgian citizens, are part and parcel of this society and this country, while belonging at the same time to the great Catholic family, which is the guarantee of fraternal and amicable relations with all Christians and with every man of good will.

In this context, I would like to remind you that after the establishment of diplomatic relations in 1992, the Holy See sent its first representative to Georgia in the person of Archbishop Jean-Paul Gobel, who as Apostolic Nuncio also exercised the important role of Apostolic Administrator for the Latins of the Caucasus. This year marks the 25th anniversary of the erection of that ecclesiastical district, established on 30 December 1993. The current Apostolic Administrator, nominated in 1996 and already mentioned by me and here present, is the indefatigable Bishop Giuseppe Pasotto. In all these years, the local Catholic community has put itself at the service of the Georgian people in significant ways, as an instrument of evangelization and of charity. A very important moment in the life of the local Church was the moment of acquiring public legal personality in 2011, which allowed it to operate more effectively in accordance with its mission. Pope Benedict XVI made mention of this significant

event in his annual speech to the Diplomatic Corps accredited to the Holy See at the beginning of 2012.

I would also like to remind you that next year, *Caritas Georgia*, which is very visible in the Georgian society, will be celebrating the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of its charitable activity in service to the needy and the poor. In fact, several religious communities (the Missionaries of Charity, the Sisters of St. Elizabeth, the Camillians, the Stigmatines, the Salesians and the Capuchins) have joined efforts in their concern for the sick, the children, the elderly, the refugees, the immigrants and all the needy, without discrimination of nationality or religious affiliation, thus realizing the true mission of the Catholic Church directed to the good of every human person.

In particular, the Catholic Church committed itself to offering humanitarian aid in the first years after independence, where basic means of life were often lacking (food, clothes, heating, etc.). The humanitarian commitment lasted even during the war of 2008, together with the support for internally displaced persons and the constant commitment to those most in need in the post-war period. In that tragic time, the then Apostolic Nuncio, Archbishop Claudio Gugerotti, currently representing the Pope in the Ukraine, expressed the vicinity of the Holy See and its concern for the population in a concrete way, being among the first to go personally to Gori to bring initial humanitarian aid.

This year is also the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the conflict endured by Georgia that led to the loss of control of the Tskhinvali and Abkhazia Regions. The Holy See marked this anniversary by publishing an article in its newspaper *L'Osservatore Romano*, recalling the two interventions of Pope Benedict XVI, given on August 10 and 17, 2008 in the Sunday Angelus in St. Peter's Square; the Holy Father made heartfelt appeals for the end of military activities, the necessity to assist victims and the hoped for truce that was then achieved thanks to the involvement of the European Union. After 10 years, and after more than 40 sessions of the Geneva talks, many issues in the political and humanitarian field remain unresolved. Furthermore, the repeated Resolutions of the United Nations General Assembly, dedicated to the issue of displaced persons and

refugees, have not been fully applied. In this sense, the words of Pope Francis during the memorable Apostolic Journey to Georgia in 2016, with which he recalled that the peaceful coexistence of all peoples and States of the Region “requires increasing mutual esteem and consideration, which can never lay aside respect for the sovereign rights of every country within the framework of international law” are still relevant. He also expressed his wish that “the path of peace and development will advance with the consolidated commitment of all sectors of society, so as to create conditions for stability, justice and respect for the rule of law, hence promoting growth and greater opportunities for all”. For my part, I can say that, faced with the ongoing conflicts in this region of the Caucasus, the Holy See cannot but regret the suffering of the affected populations and the disastrous consequences that any hostile conflict causes on the peaceful coexistence of nations, which have the right to live in harmony and peace. As far as Georgia is concerned, the Holy See has always maintained its position regarding respect for international law with reference to the territory and the borders of the country.

Among the highlights of the mutual relations between the Holy See and Georgia, in addition to the two Apostolic Visits of the Popes St. John Paul II in 1999 and Francis in 2016, there have also been official visits to the Vatican by Presidents of the Republic. I recall, in particular, the last visit to Rome of His Excellency, Mr. Giorgi Margvelashvili, on 10 April 2015, as well as visits by several high Georgian authorities to the Vatican and many Cardinals and other representatives of the Roman Curia to Georgia. My predecessor, then Archbishop Dominique Mamberti, also made an official visit to Georgia in September 2014.

There is also a fruitful cultural cooperation. In this regard, how can we forget the theatrical staging of the play “The Jeweller’s Shop” by St. John Paul II, performed in the Georgian language at the State Theatre of Tbilisi still in the 90s? Karol Wojtyła wrote this in 1960 when he was still Auxiliary Bishop of Krakow. There have been numerous other initiatives, such as projects for scholarships for Georgian students who undertook studies at the Pontifical Universities in Rome, both laity and priests of the

Georgian Orthodox Church; the activities carried out by the *Sulkhan-Saba Orbeliani University* in Tbilisi, founded on the initiative of Bishop Pasotto; the numerous conferences, receptions and exhibitions, organized in Rome with great commitment by the Ambassadors of Georgia to the Holy See: first, by Her Highness Princess Khétévane Bagration de Moukhrani - Orsini, and currently Her Excellency Dr. Tamara Grdzeldze, to whom my cordial acknowledgment is due for the friendly and robust collaboration we have built up over the years. Dr. Tamara is also promoter of the interesting volume *Rome and the Georgians*, released in Rome last year, on the occasion of the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of our diplomatic relations, which traces the centuries-long history of relations between Rome and Georgia.

Allow me to conclude this address with the words of the Holy Father, Pope Francis, which, in a certain sense, encapsulate and undergird the reflections that I have tried to share with you during this conference. The Pope, addressing the Diplomatic Corps for the traditional New Year's greetings in January 2017, focused on the theme of peace, saying: "Peace is a gift, a challenge and a commitment. It is a gift because it flows from the very heart of God. It is a challenge because it is a good that can never be taken for granted and must constantly be achieved. It is a commitment because it demands passionate effort on the part of all people of goodwill to seek and build it. For true peace can only come about on the basis of a vision of human beings capable of promoting an integral development respectful of their transcendent dignity."

Thank you for your attention.