

Communiqué of the Press Office of the Holy See

Press Office of the Holy See

Eighth Assembly of Chinese Catholic Representatives (Beijing, 7-9 December 2010)

1. With profound sorrow, the Holy See laments the fact that from 7 to 9 December 2010 there was held in Beijing the Eighth Assembly of Chinese Catholic Representatives. This was imposed on numerous Bishops, priests, religious and lay faithful. The manner in which it was convoked and its unfolding manifest a repressive attitude with regard to the exercise of religious liberty, which it was hoped had been consigned to the past in present-day China. The persistent desire to control the most intimate area of citizens' lives, namely their conscience, and to interfere in the internal life of the Catholic Church does no credit to China. On the contrary, it seems to be a sign of fear and weakness rather than of strength; of intransigent intolerance rather than of openness to freedom and to effective respect both of human dignity and of a correct distinction between the civil and religious spheres.
2. On several occasions the Holy See had let it be known, first and foremost to the Bishops, but also to all the faithful, and publicly, that they should not take part in the event. Each one of those who were present knows to what extent he or she is responsible before God and the Church. The Bishops in particular and the priests will also have to face the expectations of their respective communities, who look to

their own Pastor and have a right to receive from him sure guidance in the faith and in the moral life.

3. It is known, moreover, that many Bishops and priests were forced to take part in the Assembly. The Holy See condemns this grave violation of their human rights, particularly their freedom of religion and of conscience. Moreover, the Holy See expresses its deepest esteem for those who, in different ways, have borne witness to their faith with courage and it invites the others to pray, to do penance and, through their works, to reaffirm their own will to follow Christ with love, in full communion with the universal Church.
4. Addressing those whose hearts are full of dismay and profound suffering, those who are wondering how it is possible that their own Bishop or their own priests should have taken part in the Assembly, the Holy See asks them to remain steadfast and patient in the faith; it invites them to take account of the pressures experienced by many of their Pastors and to pray for them; it exhorts them to continue courageously supporting them in the face of the unjust impositions that they encounter in the exercise of their ministry.
5. During the Assembly, among other things, the leaders of the so-called Episcopal Conference and of the Chinese Catholic Patriotic Association were appointed. Concerning these two entities, and concerning the Assembly itself, the words written by Pope Benedict XVI in his 2007 *Letter to the Church in China* continue to apply (cf. nos. 7 and 8).

In particular, the present College of Catholic Bishops of China cannot be recognized as an Episcopal Conference by the Apostolic See: the “clandestine” Bishops, those not recognized by the Government but in communion with the

Pope, are not part of it; it includes Bishops who are still illegitimate, and it is governed by statutes that contain elements incompatible with Catholic doctrine. It is deeply deplorable that an illegitimate Bishop has been appointed as its President.

Furthermore, regarding the declared purpose to implement the principles of independence and autonomy, self-management and democratic administration of the Church, it should be remembered that this is incompatible with Catholic doctrine, which from the time of the ancient Creeds professes the Church to be “one, holy, catholic and apostolic”. It is therefore lamentable also that a legitimate Bishop has been appointed President of the Chinese Catholic Patriotic Association.

6. This is not the path that the Church must follow in the context of a great and noble nation, which attracts the attention of world opinion for its significant achievements in so many spheres, but still finds it hard to implement the demands of genuine religious freedom, despite the fact that it professes in its Constitution to respect that freedom. What is more, the Assembly has rendered more difficult the path of reconciliation between Catholics of the “clandestine communities” and those of the “official communities”, thereby inflicting a deep wound not only upon the Church in China but also upon the universal Church.
7. The Holy See profoundly regrets the fact that the celebration of the above-mentioned Assembly, as also the recent episcopal ordination without the indispensable Papal mandate, have unilaterally damaged the dialogue and the climate of trust that had been established in its relations with the Government of the People’s Republic of China. The Holy See, while reaffirming its own wish to dialogue honestly, feels

bound to state that unacceptable and hostile acts such as those just mentioned provoke among the faithful, both in China and elsewhere, a grave loss of the trust that is necessary for overcoming the difficulties and building a correct relationship with the Church, for the sake of the common good.

8. In the light of what has happened, the Holy Father's invitation — addressed on 1 December 2010 to all the Catholics of the world to pray for the Church in China which is going through a particularly difficult time — remains pressing.

17 December 2010