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Pope to G8: 'Hear the voice of Africa and the poor!'

John L. Allen Jr. | Jul. 5, 2009 NCR Today

It?s become customary for popes to write letters on the occasion of a G8 summit, which are formally addressed to the head of whichever government is hosting the event. This time around, Benedict XVI has all the more reason to write the G8 given that the upcoming July 8-10 G8 summit is taking place in the Abruzzo region of Italy, about 75 miles northeast of Rome, which was devastated by a magnitude 6.3 earthquake in April.

In the letter released yesterday by the Vatican, Benedict XVI makes a strong appeal to G8 nations not to abandon, or scale back, their commitments to development assistance for poor nations because of the current economic crisis. In fact, the pope argues, that aid is the best remedy for the crisis. Benedict opposes any backtracking on the pledge established in the UN Millennium Goals of eliminating extreme poverty by 2015. The pope also calls for stronger coordination of national economic policies at the global level, and supports greater multilateralism in foreign policy.

The lone exclamation point in the 1500-word letter comes when Benedict implores the G8 leaders, ?Listen to the voice of Africa and of economically less developed nations!?

The full text of the pope?s letter, in an NCR translation from the original Italian, follows.

To Silvio Berlusconi, President of the Council of Ministers of Italy

Honorable Mr. President:

In view of the upcoming G8 meeting of the Heads of State and Government of the group of most industrialized countries, which will take place at L?Aquila July 8-10 under the presidency of Italy, I?m pleased to send cordial greetings to you and to all the participants. I gladly take this occasion to offer a reflection on the themes of the meeting, as I?ve done in the past. I?ve been informed by my collaborators about the commitment with which the government over which you have the honor of presiding is preparing for this important appointment, and I also know how much attention it?s given to the reflections which, with regard to the themes of upcoming summit, the Holy See, the Catholic church in Italy and the Catholic world in general, as well as representatives of other religions, have formulated.

The participation of Heads of State or Government not only from the G8, but from many other nations, will mean that decisions adopted to find shared solutions to the principal problems that affect the economy, peace, and international security, can more faithfully reflect the points of view and the expectations of the populations of all the continents. This expanded participation in the discussions of the upcoming summit seems all the more opportune, taking into account that so many clusters of problems in today?s world are largely interconnected and interdependent. I?m referring in particular to the challenges of the economic-financial crisis currently underway, as well as the worrying data regarding the phenomenon of climate change, which cannot help but prompt a wise discernment and new commitment to ??convert? the model of global development? (see Benedict XVI, Angelus address of Nov. 12, 2006), rendering it capable of effectively promoting an integral human development, inspired by the values of human solidarity of love in truth. Some of these themes will be

addressed in my third encyclical *Caritas in veritate*, which will be presented to the press in the next few days.

In preparation for the Great Jubilee of 2000, under the impulse of John Paul II, the Holy See paid great attention to the work of the G8. My venerated predecessor was in fact persuaded that the liberation of the world?s poorest countries from the burden of debt, and, more generally, the elimination of the causes of extreme poverty in the world, depended upon the most economically advanced governments and states fully taking up the responsibilities of solidarity with all humanity. These responsibilities have not diminished, but rather today have become still more pressing. In the recent past ? partly thanks to the impulse that the Great Jubilee of 2000 gave to the quest for adequate solutions to the problems of debt and the economic vulnerability of Africa and other poor nations, and in part thanks to the notable changes in the global economic and political situation ? the majority of less developed nations have been able to enjoy a period of extraordinary growth, which allowed many of them to hope for the realization of the objective fixed by the international community on the threshold of the Third Millennium, which was the elimination of extreme poverty by 2015. Unfortunately, the financial and economic crisis which struck the entire planet at the beginning of 2008 has altered the panorama. There?s a real risk of not only extinguishing the hope of exiting from extreme poverty, but that populations which up to now have had a minimal level of well-bring may fall into misery.

Moreover, the current global economic crisis carries the threat of cancellation, or drastic reductions, of plans of international assistance, especially in favor of Africa and of other economically less developed nations. For that reason, with the same force with which John Paul II requested the elimination of external debt, I would also like to appeal to the member nations of the G8, to the other states represented and to the governments of the entire world, that development aid ? above all, aid designed to promote ?human resources? ? be maintained and protected, not only despite the crisis, but precisely because it?s one of the principals paths for solving the crisis. Is it not by investing in the human person ? in all the men and woman of the Earth ? that the worrying prospects of a global recession can most effectively be kept at bay? In truth, isn?t this the right way to obtain, as much as possible, a global economic direction benefitting the inhabitants of every country, rich and poor, large or small?

The theme of access to education is intimately connected to the efficiency of international cooperation. If it?s true that we much ?invest? in human beings, the goal of basic education for all, without exception, by 2015 not only must be maintained, but generously reinforced. Education is the indispensable condition for the functioning of democracy, for the fight against corruption, for the exercise of political, economic and social rights, and for the effective recovery of all States, rich and poor. With the correct application of the principle of subsidiarity, support for development also cannot help but take account of the detailed educational activity which the Catholic church and other religious confessions undertake in the poorest and most abandoned regions of the globe.

To the illustrious participants in the G8 meeting, I?d also like to recall that the measure of the technical efficiency of steps taken to resolve the crisis coincides with the measure of its ethical force. It?s therefore essential to focus on concrete human and family exigencies: I refer, for example, to the efficient creation of jobs for everyone, which allow workers to meet the needs of the families in a dignified fashion, to uphold their primary responsibility in the education of their children, and to be protagonists in the communities to which they belong. As John Paul II wrote, ?A society in which this right is systematically denied, in which economic policies do not allow workers to reach satisfactory levels of employment, cannot be justified from an ethical point of view, nor can that society attain social peace.?(*Centesimus annus*, 43; see also *Laborem excercens*, 18). Precisely for that reason, there?s urgent need for an equitable international commercial system, taking into account ? and, if necessary, going even further ? to the decisions take at Doha in 2001 in favor of development. I hope that every creative energy will be committed to achieving the commitments undertaken by the UN Millennium Summit regarding the elimination of extreme poverty by 2015. It?s a matter of duty to reform the international financial architecture to ensure the effective coordination of national policies, avoiding credit-driven speculation and guaranteeing an ample international pool of public and private credit at the service of

production and labor, especially in the hardest-hit nations and regions.

For the political commitments of the G8 to be ethically legitimate, they obviously must take into account the thinking and the needs of the entire international community. To that end, it appears important to reinforce multilateralism, not only in economic questions, but for the entire spectrum of themes regarding peace, global security, disarmament, health, and protection of the environment and natural resources for present and future generations. The expansion of the G8 to other regions is without doubt an important and significant advance; however, in negotiations and in concrete decisions, all positions must be taken into account, not simply those of the most important nations or those with the most remarkable economic success. Only by doing so can those decisions realistically become applicable and sustainable over time. Therefore, listen to the voice of Africa and of economically less developed nations! Seek effective ways to connect the decisions of various groupings of nations, including the G8, to the General Assembly of the United Nations, where every country, whatever it political and economic weight, can legitimately express itself in a situation of equality with the others.

Finally, I?d like to add how meaningful it is that the Italian government has chosen to host the G8 in the city of L?Aquila, a choice approved and shared by the other member-states and invited guests. We are all witnesses to the generous solidarity of the Italian people and of other nations, as well as national and international organizations, towards the people of the Abruzzo struck by the earthquake. This mobilization of solidarity could represent an invitation for the members of the G8, and for the governments and peoples of the world, to address in a united fashion the current challenges which unavoidably set choices before us which will be decisive for the human future, which is intimately connected with that of creation.

Honorable Mr. President, while I implore God?s assistance upon all those present at the upcoming G8 of L?Aquila, and upon the multilateral initiatives intended to resolve to economic-financial crisis and to guarantee a future of peace and prosperity for all men and women with exception, I gladly take the occasion to express once again my esteem, and, assuring you of my prayers, I extend a deferential and cordial salute.

From the Vatican, July 1, 2009

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