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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 05 VATICAN 000078

SIPDIS

FOR THE PRESIDENT FROM THE CHARGE D'AFFAIRES

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SUBJECT: HOLY SEE: SCENESETTER FOR THE PRESIDENT'S JULY 10 VISIT

REF: A. A) VATICAN 72 B. B) VATICAN 63 C. C) VATICAN 59 D. D) VATICAN 52 E.
E) VATICAN 38

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CLASSIFIED BY: Julieta Valls Noyes, CDA, EXEC, State. REASON: 1.4 (b), (d) Mr. President, it's an honor to welcome you and your family to the Vatican, the world's smallest sovereign state, and one with global clout.

Summary

¶1. (C/NF) Holy See officials also are pleased you are visiting. Your meeting with Pope Benedict XVI will be an opportunity to discuss our shared commitments to overarching goals such as peace, justice, development, human dignity, and inter-faith understanding. From the Vatican's perspective, it will also provide a forum to discuss sensitive bioethical issues in a mutually respectful way. In your meeting with him, or possibly with other Vatican officials on the margins, you may cover other topics of special interest, such as the Middle East, Iraq, immigration, and the environment. Your discussions at the Holy See will help deepen our mutual collaboration on issues around the world. End Summary.

Context for Your Visit

¶2. (C/NF) The Vatican is second only to the United States in the number of countries with which it enjoys diplomatic relations (188 and 177 respectively), and there are Catholic priests, nuns and lay people in every country on the planet. As a result, the Holy See is interested and well informed about developments all over the globe. This year marks the 25th anniversary of formal relations between the U.S. and Holy See. The Holy See is the global government of the Catholic Church, which it operates from Vatican City State, a sovereign territory of a quarter of a square mile.

¶3. (C/NF) The Holy See in many ways welcomed your election, as demonstrated by the Pope's immediate letter of congratulation. Vatican officials have been impressed by many of your initiatives, especially on foreign policy. The Vatican newspaper, the "Osservatore Romano," has welcomed your positions on the Israeli-Palestinian situation, outreach to Muslims, disarmament, Cuba and the environment. The Holy See has appreciated your multilateralism and focus on human rights, including your decisions to run for the Human Rights Council and close the Guantanamo detainee facility. Nevertheless, although it does not generally express them publicly, the Vatican also has profound concerns about your Administration's positions on abortion and embryonic stem cell research. The Vatican has allowed the American Catholic Church to take the lead in enunciating these concerns. This is a tactical decision, and should not be interpreted as a divergence of views between Rome and the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB). The Vatican trusts the USCCB, is proud of the work that Catholic organizations do in the U.S., and relies on the generosity of American Catholics to support the Vatican and Catholic causes worldwide. On balance, the Vatican regards your Presidency favorably and will seek to focus more on the areas of policy convergence between us than on the issues that divide us.

Pope Benedict XVI

¶4. (C/NF) The Pope has had a rocky year, having confronted controversies about Catholic-Jewish relations and his views on AIDS prevention, and breakdowns in internal Vatican communications related to the controversies. At the same time, he also took crucial, successful trips to the Middle East and Africa. He is looking forward to meeting you. The Pope genuinely likes Americans and the United States, and enjoyed his visit there last year. He admires the U.S. model of secularism, where the church and state are separate but which he says "allows for professing belief in God and respects the public role of religion and churches." The Pope has made promotion of international religious freedom a central objective of his papacy, and appreciates U.S. support for this goal. As the spiritual leader of 1.3 billion Catholics worldwide and enjoying

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respect as well from non-Catholics, the Pope wields an unparalleled moral megaphone. He uses it carefully, speaking publicly in generic, neutral terms about the need for peace and social justice rather than criticizing individual states. Behind closed doors, he sometimes takes on specific issues more

directly. In that context, a Vatican official had told us that the Pope probably will raise abortion, embryonic stem cell research, and social justice issues -- especially immigration -- with you.

Bioethical Issues

¶5. (C/NF) The Catholic Church teaches that abortion is wrong. Vatican officials grudgingly accept that abortion is legal in the U.S., but oppose making it more widely available. Internationally, the Vatican would forcefully oppose USG advocacy of legalizing abortion elsewhere, financing foreign abortions, or making abortion an international "reproductive right." The Vatican would welcome an honest, respectful dialogue with the United States on abortion. Vatican officials followed your Notre Dame speech closely. While clearly not agreeing with everything you said, they were very pleased by your calls to reduce the number of women seeking abortions, make adoption more available, and provide support for pregnant women. They appreciated your commitment to "honor the conscience of those who disagree with abortion," and especially welcomed the call for a sensible conscience clause for health care workers.

¶6. (C/NF) The Vatican opposes embryonic stem cell research on the grounds that it leads to the destruction of human embryos. It has no objection to non-embryonic stem cell research. As new techniques now allow research with adult stem cells, the Vatican says the use of embryonic stem cells is not justified scientifically either.

Financial Crisis, the Poor, and Immigration

¶7. (C/NF) The Vatican has been very vocal about protecting the world's most vulnerable people from harm caused by the global financial crisis. In a letter to UK PM Gordon Brown, for example, the Pope wrote, "Development aid, including the commercial and financial conditions favorable to less developed countries and the cancellation of the external debt of the poorest and most indebted countries, has not been the cause of the crisis and out of fundamental justice must not be its victim." The Vatican criticizes "consumerist" societies, strongly supports the UN Millennium Development Goals, and hopes all countries will redouble efforts to meet their MDG pledges. The Vatican has long supported freer migration between nations to permit the poor to begin new lives. The USCCB has made immigration reform a priority in the U.S., and the Pope will likely mention this in his discussions with you. The Pope is expected to issue the second "encyclical" (letter addressed to the whole world about pressing moral issues) of his papacy sometime during the week before your meeting. It will cover social justice concerns, and the Pope will likely mention it to you. (Embassy will forward a copy to the White House as soon as it is available.)

Food Security

¶8. (C/NF) Similarly, the Vatican is very worried about declining nutrition in the poorest countries. The Vatican has not taken a formal position on genetically modified (GM) crops -- some Church leaders oppose them because GM technology is mostly in the hands of multinational corporations, while others support their use as an element in a larger strategy to address world hunger. In his World Food Day message in October 2008, the Pope noted that the world can produce enough food to meet increasing needs, but said factors like speculation in foodstuffs, corrupt public officials, and growing investments in weapons prevented food from reaching the hungry. He called on world leaders to conclude negotiations to ensure food security, and to pursue relations "based on the reciprocal exchange of knowledge, values, rapid assistance and respect."

Environmental Issues

¶9. (C/NF) The Pope speaks frequently about the importance of caring for God's creation. Vatican City is the world's first carbon-neutral state, offsetting its emissions through use of renewable energy and a reforestation project. It has not, however, taken a position on carbon emissions trade. The Vatican is now using solar energy to power some facilities and is reducing its energy consumption overall, planning to be 20% energy self-sufficient by 2020. The Holy See is an active observer at the UN Environment Program, Food and Agriculture Organization and other international fora, and will participate in the December Copenhagen Conference also as an observer. The Pope has even joined with other religious leaders like Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew to issue moral appeals to their faithful on humanity's responsibility to be good stewards of nature. The Vatican's environmental message is consistent: nature is a gift from God, so human beings have a responsibility to care for and not to abuse it.

Arms Reduction

¶10. (C/NF) The Vatican welcomed your call to eliminate nuclear weapons, and has long advocated arms reductions and non-proliferation. The Holy See was one of the initial signatories to the Convention on Cluster Munitions in December 2008 - and ratified it the same day. (The Vatican of course has no such weapons itself and becomes party to such agreements to serve as a moral example.) The Pope has advocated the elimination of land mines, and the Holy See is a party to the Mine Ban Treaty. Speaking at the UN in May, the Vatican envoy reaffirmed the Vatican's support for nuclear non-proliferation and outlined five steps for nations to take to eliminate the nuclear weapons threat: adherence to the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty, opening negotiations for a Fissile Material Cutoff Treaty, ending reliance on nuclear arms as part of military policy among nuclear states, giving the International Atomic Energy Association oversight over peaceful use of nuclear energy and expanding its role to include non-proliferation, and developing a new international agreement on nuclear fuel.

Inter-faith Understanding

¶11. (C/NF) The Vatican praised your Cairo speech, especially the sections on religious freedom and diversity, the Israeli-Palestinian situation, and Iran. The Vatican itself has worked for decades on improving understanding with the Islamic world, including through a pontifical institute for the study of Arabic and Islam. It stepped up inter-faith discussions after the September 11 attacks, and then again following the negative Muslim reaction to a 2006 speech by the Pope that some argued demeaned Islam. Key dialogues are with: the "group of 138" - moderate Muslim scholars and clerics - supported by Jordan; Iranian clerics; Al-Azhar University in Cairo, which co-hosted your speech; and Saudi authorities. The Vatican's primary objective for these talks is to promote religious freedom. The Holy See does not believe theological agreements with Islam are possible, but is convinced that better mutual knowledge will allay suspicions and facilitate peaceful co-existence, which they consider an even higher goal than simple "tolerance." Another Vatican goal is supporting pragmatic inter-faith cooperation on social welfare programs. The Vatican believes governments should ensure religious freedom, but not be directly involved in interreligious dialogue (which by its nature should be between religious leaders).

Middle East Peace Process

¶12. (C/NF) Peace in the "Holy Land" is one of the Vatican's top priorities, and was one of the central themes of the Pope's May visit to Israel, Jordan and the Palestinian territories. Despite criticism from some media and extremists, the trip was substantively successful. The Pope avoided any major mis-steps (always

a difficult prospect for a Pontiff in visiting this area) and delivered the message that a two-state solution is the key to peace. He emphasized that the use of violence to achieve political objectives is morally unacceptable. He called for

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inter-faith dialogue and protection of Christian minorities. His messages largely mirror the U.S. approach to the region. This provides opportunities for further engagement with the U.S. in advancing peace initiatives there.

Iraq and Christians

¶13. (C/NF) The Holy See publicly opposed U.S. intervention in Iraq. Once fighting began, however, the Vatican focus shifted to securing peace and justice, rebuilding the Iraqi economy, and protecting minority Christian communities. Holy See officials welcome your proposals for responsible withdrawal of U.S. troops, provided this does not create a security vacuum, particularly in Christian areas. The Vatican appreciates U.S. resettlement of the most vulnerable Iraqi victims of persecution -- including many Christians-- but seeks to avoid large-scale exodus of Christians from that country. (Regional bishops estimate as many as half of the region's 300-400,000 Chaldean Christians have left, and believe they will not return.) The Vatican was deeply concerned last fall that quotas set for Iraq's provincial elections system might reduce Christian representation in local governments, fueling further emigration. It took the unusual step of formally asking the USG to press the Iraqis to increase the quotas for Christians. Despite a boycott threat, Christians ultimately participated in the provincial elections. The future of the Christian communities in Iraq will remain high on the Vatican agenda before and after the U.S. military drawdown.

Africa

¶14. (C/NF) The Pope travelled to Africa in March. He grabbed headlines with an interview he gave en route saying that the use of condoms contributed to the spread of AIDS. The Vatican later clarified the Pope's comments, saying that condoms are not always 100% effective and noting studies that show condom distribution increases promiscuity. Benedict XVI has called on world leaders to pay special attention to the needs of the Continent - where one in four people suffer from chronic hunger -- this year. In a letter to the German President, Pope Benedict wrote that the "support of the international community is needed...precisely because the current financial and economic crisis is particularly affecting Africa." The Pontiff has pledged the Church's continued assistance to the weakest sectors of Africa's population. (The UN estimates that Catholic charities provide 17% of health care in sub-Saharan Africa; the Church also runs schools, homes for the aged, re-integration centers for child soldiers and other programs there.) Bishops from Africa will gather in Rome in October for a month to discuss needs on the continent.

Cuba

¶15. (C/NF) The Church is the only major institution in Cuba that is independent from the government. The Vatican hopes for a transition to democracy in Cuba, but is not at the forefront of that battle because it is more concerned about protecting its small space for operations in Cuba. The Vatican opposes the U.S. embargo, which it believes hurts poor Cubans disproportionately. It welcomed your decision to remove limits on family visitation and remittances. Vatican officials believe that exchanging the five Cuban spies imprisoned in the U.S. for political prisoners in Cuba is worth discussing, and have urged the U.S. to grant visas to the wives of the spies to allow them to visit.

Turkey EU Accession

¶16. (C/NF) As Cardinal Ratzinger, the Pope had expressed uneasiness about the notion Turkish accession to the EU. The Holy See's position now is that as a non-EU member the Vatican has no role in promoting or vetoing Turkey's membership. The Vatican might prefer to see Turkey develop a special relationship short of membership with the EU, but Vatican Secretary of State (Prime Minister-equivalent) Bertone has stated that Turkey should become a member if it meets all the EU

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criteria - including full protection of human rights and religious freedoms.

Iran

¶17. (C/NF) The Holy See is deeply concerned about the recent violence and ongoing human rights violations in Iran. It has been publicly silent to date on the current crisis, in part to preserve its ability to act as an intermediary if an international crisis emerges. (The Vatican helped secure the release of British sailors detained in Iranian waters in April 2007.) It is unclear how much clout the Vatican really has with Iran, however. NOYES