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SIPDIS

DEPARTMENT FOR OES DREW NELSON, RACHEL KASTENBERG, KATE LARSEN

EO 12958 DECL: 1/20/2035

TAGS KGHG, PGOV, PREL, CU, VE, VT

SUBJECT: "GREEN" POPE SUPPORTS US PATH FORWARD FROM COPENHAGEN

REF: A. A. STATE 3080 B. B. 09 VATICAN 132

CLASSIFIED BY: Julieta Valls Noyes, DCM. REASON: 1.4 (b), (d) 1. (C) Summary: The Holy See supports USG efforts to have countries associate themselves with the Copenhagen Accord by the January 31 deadline (ref. A), and will encourage them to do so. The Pope's recent environmental messages offer Vatican officials a strong platform to leverage the moral authority of the Church to combat climate change. While the Vatican supports the inclusion of all countries in international environmental discussions and decision-making, it is not naove about the political motives behind Cuba's and Venezuela's criticism of Copenhagen. End summary.

¶2. (C) On January 20, P/EOff met with Dr. Paolo Conversi, the Vatican's point person on climate change at the Secretariat of State, to deliver ref. A demarche. Conversi immediately expressed the Holy See's genuine desire to see the Copenhagen process move forward. He was aware of the January 31 deadline but did not know which countries had agreed formally to join the process. Conversi agreed to encourage other countries discreetly to associate themselves with the Accord, as opportunities arise. (Note: For practical reasons, the Holy See will not formally associate itself with the Copenhagen Accord: Vatican City State's carbon footprint negligible. The Vatican decision is consistent with its practice of not becoming a formal party to agreements if they require substantial technical expertise and reporting commitments).

¶3. (C) Conversi was pleased overall with the process leading to Copenhagen and with the Conference itself. He said expectations were too high before the event. Regarding the group of dissenting countries, including Venezuela and Cuba, Conversi said the Vatican was sympathetic to their complaints about inclusion in decision-making but believed their criticism was largely politically motivated. Noting that Pope Benedict had firmly established his "green" reputation using his New Years' Day Peace message to highlight environmental protection (ref. B), Conversi said he looked forward to further collaboration with the U.S. prior to Bonn and Mexico City.

¶4. (U) In a separate meeting, Monsignor James Reinert, the environmental analyst at the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace (a Vatican think tank), confirmed to P/EOff that the profile of environmental issues in the Vatican is at an all-time high. Secretariat of State officers represented the Holy See at environmental meetings now, where in the past his own office would have had the lead. (Note: Justice and Peace will continue to produce analytical documents on environmental issues for bishops around the world, while the Secretariat will have the lead on policy, particularly in multilateral fora.)

¶5. (C) Comment: Conversi's offer to support the U.S., even if discreetly, is significant because the Vatican is often reluctant to appear to compromise its independence and moral authority by associating itself with particular lobbying efforts. Even more important than the Vatican's lobbying assistance, however, is the influence the Pope's guidance can have on public opinion in countries with large Catholic majorities and beyond. End Comment.

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