

**PRIME MINISTER KEVIN RUDD'S
ADDRESS AT THE OFFICIAL FAREWELL TO
HIS HOLINESS POPE BENEDICT XVI,
KINGSFORD SMITH AIRPORT, SYDNEY**

Monday, 21 July 2008

Your Holiness, it is only a week since I greeted you on your arrival on your first visit to Australia. Yet in that week Your Holiness it feels very much that you have already become one with us. Indeed that you have become one of us.

I said on your arrival that in Australia you were among friends. Your Holiness after sharing this week with us I believe you now know you are among friends.

And the sun had shone literally on your visit for the duration of your visit and it has been a good thing.

As we think back on this last great week of reflection and celebration, the minds and hearts of our people are filled with the images of affirmation, of possibility and of unity.

We think of the sea of flags from practically all the nations of the earth. We think of the ocean of young people who have come literally from every corner of God's earth. And how this hard bitten Sydney city has taken these young people to their hearts.

We think of your arrival by boat at Barangaroo.

We think of your warm embrace of our first Australians who have experienced so much hurt and suffering at our hands over the centuries, but with whom the process of reconciliation has now begun.

We think of the ancient symbols of the Stations of the Cross, cast against the modernity of the Sydney skyline.

We think of your message of healing and hope to the victims of abuse.

We think of your message of spiritual purpose in this materialist age.

Your message of care for this planet that has been entrusted to us to be its custodians not just its exploiters.

And Holy Father your continuing message of faith and reason. Not in hostility to each other but in harmony with each other.

Beyond these great messages, Holy Father, we have also been touched by your simple humanity. Of your ignoring of centuries of Papal protocol to don the cap of a NSW Police constable, of giving hope to the dying and indeed to one who has now died.

Your Holiness in Australia we are a relatively informal lot and we like that approach, we like it very much. And you should now see yourself very much as the Honorary Chaplain of the NSW Police Force.

Your Holiness your visit has been of great significance to Australian Catholics, to the wider Australian Christian community and indeed to all Australians. Your visit is also of significance in the relationship between Australia and the Holy See.

For 35 years our two States have enjoyed excellent diplomatic relations since my predecessor Prime Minister Gough Whitlam established that relationship in 1973.

Today I announce that for the first time Australia will have a resident Ambassador to the Holy See in Rome. And today I announce that the Government will be recommending to his Excellency the Governor General the appointment of the former Deputy Prime Minister of Australia the Honourable Tim Fischer as Australia's first resident Ambassador to the Holy See.

In doing so Australia will join the 69 other nations with resident Ambassadors to the Holy See. Your Holiness I am confident that Mr Fischer, Ambassador Fischer as he will be, will discharge this position with dignity and enable Australia and the Holy See to work together on the great challenges we face in the world.

On human rights, including political and religious freedom across the world. On poverty, on food security, on international humanitarian relief, on peace, arms control and disarmament. On the great challenge of climate change and the other great debates affecting the future of our planet.

Your Holiness we thank you for making this very long journey to Australia. Australians are accustomed to the voyage; those who come here for the first time are not. And it is as you said the other day a daunting voyage.

We now entrust you to the flying kangaroo for your safe return to Rome. Please Holy Father bear us in your thoughts and prayers for the future. That we here in Australia may work indeed to shape a better world for the future.

Holy Father we wish you farewell.