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The Credential Letters of the Ambassadors of Iceland, Bangladesh, Syria, Gambia and Kazakhstan to the Holy See

This morning, in the Vatican Apostolic Palace, the Holy Father Francis received in audience the ambassadors of Iceland, Bangladesh, Syria, Gambia and Kazakhstan to the Holy See, on the occasion of the presentation of their credential letters.

The following are the Pope's address to the new ambassadors and a brief biography of each one:

Address of the Holy Father

Your Excellencies,

I offer you a warm welcome and I gladly receive the Letters accrediting you as Ambassadors Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of your countries to the Holy See: Iceland, Bangladesh, Syria, The Gambia and Kazakhstan. In conveying my greetings to your respective Heads of State, I kindly ask that you assure them of a remembrance in my prayers as they carry out their service. My thoughts in particular turn to the beloved Syrian people who are still recovering from the recent violent earthquake in the midst of the ongoing suffering caused by armed conflict.

If we take an honest look at the current situation of our world, even a cursory glance could leave us shocked and discouraged. One thinks of the many places in the world such as Sudan, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Myanmar, Lebanon and Jerusalem, which are facing conflict and unrest. Haiti continues to experience a grave social, economic and humanitarian crisis. Then there is, of course, the ongoing war in Ukraine which has led to untold suffering and death. In addition, we see the increasing flow of forced migration, the effects of climate change and a large number of our brothers and sisters around the world who are still living in poverty due to the lack of access to drinking water, food, basic healthcare, education and dignified work. There is, without a doubt, a growing imbalance in the global economic system.

When will we learn from history that the ways of violence, oppression and unbridled ambition to conquer land do

not benefit the common good? When will we learn that investing in the wellbeing of people is always better than spending resources on the development of deadly weapons? When will we learn that social, economic and security issues are all interrelated? When will we learn that we are one human family which can only truly thrive when all of its members are respected, cared for and able to make their own unique contributions? Until we come to this realization, we will continue to experience what I have been calling a third world war being fought piecemeal. Perhaps this description seems troubling to our sensibilities, especially due to our contentment over the extraordinary technological and scientific achievements made or our satisfaction with the steps already taken to address social issues and further develop international law. While they are all certainly laudable in their own right, we must never become complacent or indifferent concerning the current situation of the world nor fail to guarantee that all of our brothers and sisters benefit from these achievements and developments.

At the same time, we must also remain optimistic and determined that the human family is capable of successfully facing the challenges of our day. In this regard, we look to the service that you, dear Ambassadors, are called to carry out. As you well know, the Office of Ambassador is an ancient and noble one. It was even incorporated into Christian Scripture by the Apostle Paul when he used the term to describe the followers of Jesus Christ (cf. 2 *Cor.* 5:20). Indeed, the positive role of the Ambassador is attested to in every age and in varying types of situations. If you allow me, I would like to share some brief thoughts on why I think that is the case. As a man or woman of dialogue, a bridge builder, an Ambassador can serve as a figure of hope. Hope in the ultimate goodness of humanity. Hope that common ground is possible because we are all part of the human family. Hope that the last word in avoiding conflict or resolving one peacefully is never said. Hope that peace is not an unrealistic dream. While still faithfully serving his or her country of origin, the Ambassador tries to put aside unhelpful emotions and rise above entrenched positions in order to find acceptable solutions. It is certainly not an easy task. The voice of reason and calls for peace often fall on deaf ears. The current situation of the world, however, only further highlights the need for Ambassadors and their colleagues to be champions of dialogue, champions of hope. The Holy See values the important role that you play, as evidenced by its own diplomatic involvement on the bilateral and multilateral levels.

For its part, the Holy See, in conformity with its nature and particular mission, strives to protect the inviolable dignity of each person, promote the common good and foster human fraternity among all peoples. These efforts, which do not include the pursuit of political, commercial or military aims, are carried out through the exercise of a positive neutrality. Far from being an “ethical neutrality”, especially in the face of human suffering, this affords the Holy See a certain standing in the international community that allows it to better assist in the resolution of conflicts and other matters.

In light of these observations, I am confident that there will be many opportunities for you to collaborate with the Holy See on matters of common concern. In this regard, I can assure you that the Secretariat of State, along with the other Dicasteries and Offices of the Holy See, are more than willing to engage with you in open and honest dialogue as we work together for the betterment of the human family. As you begin this new service, dear Ambassadors, I willingly invoke upon you, your families, your diplomatic collaborators and staff, abundant divine blessings.

Dear Ambassadors, I must apologize since I read this address thinking that you had the English translation. Unfortunately, the Secretariat did not provide one. I assume responsibility for this and I ask for your pardon. The translation will be sent to you. Thank you!

Curriculum vitae of the new ambassadors

**His Excellency Mr. Einar Gunnarsson
Ambassador of Iceland to the Holy See**

Born in 1966 in Reykjavik, His Excellency Mr. Einar Gunnarsson is married with two children. He holds a licentiate in law from the University of Iceland (1992).

He has held the following offices: attorney at law, *GÁJ Law Firm*, Reykjavík (1992 - 1995); legal advisor / Deputy Director, Department of Defence, Ministry of Foreign Affairs (1996 - 1998); First Secretary / Advisor, Department of Foreign Trade, Ministry of Foreign Affairs (1998 - 2000); counsellor, Embassy to the European Union, Brussels (2000 - 2004); Deputy Permanent Representative / Minister Counsellor, Permanent Mission to International Organizations, Geneva (2004 - 2006); Director of Human Resources for the Foreign Service, Ministry of Foreign Affairs (2007 - 2008); Director - Principal Negotiator, Department of International Trade Negotiations, Ministry of Foreign Affairs (2008 - 2009); Permanent Secretary of State, Ministry of Foreign Affairs (2009 - 2014); Ambassador, Permanent Representative to the United Nations, New York (2015 - 2018); Ambassador, Arctic Affairs, Ministry of Foreign Affairs (2019 - 2021); Ambassador, Office of the Permanent Secretary of State, MFA (2021 - 2022); Ambassador and Permanent Representative to International Organizations, Geneva, and to Switzerland (from 2022).

**His Excellency Mr. Mohammad Sufiur Rahman
Ambassador of Bangladesh to the Holy See**

His Excellency Mr. Mohammad Sufiur Rahman was born on 1 December 1964 and is married with three children.

He graduated in civil engineering from the Bangladesh University of Engineering and Technology (BUET), and holds a Master in Business Administration from the Institute of Business Administration, Dhaka University. He attended courses at the NESAC Centre of National Defence University, Washington DC (in 2003 and in 2014).

He has held the following offices: First Secretary to the High Commission in India (1995-1999); counsellor at the Permanent Mission of the United Nations in Geneva (1999-2002); Director at the SAARC Secretariat (South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation) (2004-2007); Deputy High Commissioner in Pakistan (2008-2009); Director General at the SAARC and Director General for Economic Affairs at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (2010-2012); High Commissioner in Sri Lanka (2012-2014); Ambassador in Myanmar (2014-2017); High Commissioner in Australia, New Zealand and Fiji (2017-2022).

**His Excellency Mr. Louay Fallouh
Ambassador of the Syrian Arab Republic to the Holy See**

His Excellency Mr. Louay Fallouh was born in Izraa, province of Daraa, on 21 December 1964.

He is married with two children. He is of Catholic Greek-Melkite religion. He holds a licentiate in law from the University of Damascus (1986), and a diploma in international law specializing in commercial arbitration from the University of Reims (1995).

He has held the following positions: lecturer in Law at the University of Damascus (1996 - 2000); Third Secretary at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (Department of International Hydraulic Resources, Department of Protocol, Department of Law, Department of Culture) (1998 - 2000); Second Secretary, Delegation to the United Nations, New York (2000 - 2005); First Secretary, Office of the Minister of Foreign Affairs (2005 - 2006); First Secretary, Office of the Vice President of the Republic (2006 - 2007); First Secretary, Delegation to the United Nations, New York (2007 - 2013); Deputy-Director, Department of International Organizations and Congresses at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Expatriates (2013 - 2015); Minister-Counsellor and later Deputy Permanent Representative, Delegation to the United Nations (2015 - 2020); Director of the Department of Europe at the

Ministry of Foreign Affairs (2020 - 2022); Permanent Representative to UNESCO (from January 2023).

**Her Excellency Dr. Fatou Bom Bensouda
Ambassador of Gambia to the Holy See**

Born in Banjul on 31 January 1961, Her Excellency Dr. Fatou Bom Bensouda is married with two children.

She graduated in law from the IFE University in Gambia and the Nigeria Law School in Lagos (1983-1987), and obtained a master's degree from the UN/IMO International Maritime Law Institute (1991).

From 1982 to 1997 she worked as clerk of court, public prosecutor, state counsel, senior state counsel, principal state counsel, and counsel to the Commission of Inquiry into the Financial Activities of Public Corporations in Gambia.

She subsequently held the following offices: Deputy Director of Public Prosecutions, Gambia (1993-1997); Attorney General and Secretary General of the Republic of the Gambia (1997 - 1998); Attorney General and Secretary of State for Justice, the Gambia (1998 - 2000); private legal practitioner at "Ya Sadi Chambers", and "Amie Bensouda and Co.", Banjul (2000 - 2002); general manager at the International Bank for Commerce Ltd, Banjul (2002); legal advisor and counsel at the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda (ICTR) (2002 - 2004); deputy prosecutor of the International Criminal Court (ICC) (2004 - 2012); chief prosecutor of the International Criminal Court (ICC) (2012 - 2021); and High Commissioner of the Gambia in the United Kingdom (2022 - 2023).

**His Excellency Mr. Kairat Sarzhanov
Ambassador of Kazakhstan to the Holy See**

Born on 24 February 1967, His Excellency Mr. Kairat Sarzhanov is married with two children.

He received his academic formation at the State University of Moscow (1987-1992) and the Diplomatic Academy of the Russian Federation (1993-1995).

He has held the following offices, among others: attaché, then Third Secretary, International Security and Arms Control Unit, MFA (1995 - 1997); Second Secretary, State Protocol Unit, Ministry of Foreign Affairs (1997 - 1999); First Secretary and then Counsellor, Multilateral Cooperation Department, Ministry of Foreign Affairs (1999 - 2002); First Secretary and then Counsellor, Embassy in Japan (2002 - 2006); Head of the International Organizations and Multilateral Cooperation Department, Ministry of Foreign Affairs (2006 - 2007); Counsellor, then Minister Counsellor, at the Embassy in the Czech Republic (2007 - 2011); Director of the Department of Administration and Control, Ministry of Foreign Affairs (2011 - 2016); Ambassador to Brazil, (2016 - 2021); with accreditation in Argentina and Chile (2017 - 2021); Director of the Department of International Security, Ministry of Foreign Affairs (2021 - 2022); and Ambassador to Switzerland (from 2022).
