

Holy See's U.N. observer mission get diplomatic privileges

WASHINGTON - President George W. Bush signed a law Jan. 11 that lets him grant diplomatic privileges and immunities to the Holy See's Permanent Observer Mission to the United Nations.

The Holy See is not a member of the United Nations, but its permanent observer status, held since 1964, entitles it to participate in General Assembly debates, have its communications issued and circulated as official documents of the assembly, and co-sponsor draft resolutions and decisions that refer to the Holy See.

The new law, the "Department of State Authorities Act of 2006," authorizes the president to give the observer mission and its members "the privileges and immunities enjoyed by the diplomatic missions of member states to the United Nations, and their members."

Congress passed the act Dec. 9, 2006. It was one of the final acts of the 109th Congress before it adjourned.

Diplomatic immunity ensures safe passage for diplomats outside their home country. They are not subject to lawsuits or prosecution under the laws of the host country.