

Pope urges G-8 leaders to listen to poor, continue development aid

VATICAN CITY – Pope Benedict XVI asked leaders of the world's wealthiest countries to "listen to the voice of Africa" and poor countries during their summit in Italy.

The global economic crisis threatens not only to derail efforts to end extreme poverty in the world, but also could plunge other countries into ruin as well, the pope said in a July 4 letter to Italian Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi, host of the Group of Eight summit.

The only way to find solutions that will match the global dimensions of the crisis and have long-term positive effects for all peoples is to "listen to the voice of Africa and the countries least-developed economically," the pope said in his letter.

The G-8 summit July 8-10 in L'Aquila, Italy, was to bring together the heads of governments of Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, Russia, the United Kingdom and the United States.

Italy also invited the leaders of Brazil, China, India, Mexico, South Africa, Egypt, Australia, Indonesia and South Korea to participate in some of the summit sessions.

Pope Benedict said the invitations were important for ensuring the success of the summit's decisions on matters dealing with the economy, peace and international security.

Wise discernment and new ideas "to 'convert' the model of global development" are needed to address the economic crisis as well as "the worrying data regarding the phenomenon of climate change," the pope said.

Pope Benedict said his encyclical "Caritas in Veritate" ("Charity in Truth"), which was to be released July 7, would discuss the importance of "the values of human solidarity and of love in truth" in development programs and international cooperation.

In order to function, the technical solutions adopted by the G-8 must keep in mind certain ethical values because real people are involved and will be impacted, he said.

“One must keep in mind concrete human and familial needs. I am referring, for example, to the creation of jobs for everyone to allow working men and women to provide for the needs of their families in a dignified way and permit them to fulfill their primary responsibility to educate their children and to be active in the communities to which they belong,” he said.

Pope Benedict also pleaded with the G-8 leaders not to cut their development aid to the world’s poor as they struggle to rebuild their own economies.

“I appeal to the member nations of the G-8, the other national representatives and to governments around the world to ensure that development aid, particularly aid that gives priority to ‘human resources,’ is maintained and increased, not only despite the crisis, but precisely because this is one of the principal ways of solving it,” he said.

Before the year 2000 Pope John Paul II called the G-8’s attention to the poorest countries’ crushing burden of foreign debt and to the wealthier nations’ responsibility to act in solidarity with them, he said.

“This responsibility has not weakened, but rather has become more pressing,” he said.

For a time, he said, many developing nations enjoyed a period of economic growth, “which allowed many of them to hope” that the U.N. Millennium Development Goals for eliminating extreme poverty by 2015 would succeed.

“Unfortunately, the financial and economic crisis, which has enveloped the entire planet since the beginning of 2008, has changed the panorama so that there is a real risk not only of extinguishing hopes for ending extreme poverty, but also that populations that have benefited from a minimum of material well-being may fall into poverty,” the pope said.

Pope Benedict said there is an urgent need to put “an equitable international trade system” into action to promote development.

And, he said, “it is necessary to reform the architecture of international finance to assure the effective coordination of national policies” to avoid risky financial speculation and to provide credit to businesses and projects that will create employment, especially in the poorest countries.

The pope also asked the G-8 leaders to be farsighted in their discussions and to pay particular attention to the need to ensure basic education for all the world’s children.

“If it is true that one must invest in people, the objective of providing basic education for everyone without exclusion by the year 2015 not only must be maintained, but it must be generously reinforced,” he said.

“Education is indispensable for the functioning of a democracy, for the battle against corruption, for the exercise of political, economic and social rights and for the effective recovery of all nations, rich and poor,” the pope said.