

ADDRESS

delivered by

H.E. Archbishop Dr. Pedro LÓPEZ QUINTANA

Apostolic Nuncio in Austria

Doyen of the Diplomatic Corps

at the NEW YEAR'S RECEPTION

given by Federal President Dr. Alexander VAN DER BELLEN

(Vienna, 14th January 2020)

Unofficial translation

Your Excellency, Mr. Federal President,
Madam Schmidauer,
Your Excellency, Federal Minister Schallenberg,
Excellencies, Colleagues,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is the first time that the beginning of this New Year allows me, in my capacity as Doyen of the Diplomatic Corps accredited to the Republic of Austria, to offer you our best wishes for good health and fruitful work in your service as President of the Republic. We sincerely wish you, your esteemed spouse and the Austrian people peace, happiness, well-being and God's blessings for the year 2020!

Looking back to 2019, the year in which we celebrated, among other events, the 70th anniversary of the adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, we are reminded of the fact that a great deal remains to be done, irrespective of the enormous progress achieved in the field of human rights. Even today, millions of people are still suffering inequalities and injustice. Poverty, hunger, armed conflicts, new forms of slavery, restrictions of the freedom of religion, the fast degradation of nature, and the nuclear threat all represent dramatic challenges that need to be recognized and addressed.

For Austria, the past year was a year of unforeseen political events, which led to early elections to the National Council in September 2019. Last week, a new coalition government was inaugurated, to which we extend our best wishes for a successful legislative term.

2020 is an important year of commemoration in the history of Austria: 100 years ago, the victorious Allied Powers of the First World War laid down the borders of the territory of today's Republic of Austria in the Treaty of Saint Germain. In October of the same year, the first elections to the National Council were held in the young Federal Republic. Two months after the elections, Austria was admitted to the League of Nations.

This year, we will also commemorate the 75th anniversary of the end of the Second World War and the tragic moment when nuclear power was used for the first time with devastating effects, destroying the cities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki and bringing death to almost all their inhabitants.

Turning to the future, I think it is safe to say that the third decade of the 21st century will be marked by special concern over the environment and the climate crisis. The outcome of the long and difficult negotiations at the UN Climate Conference in Madrid in December of last year represented nothing but the lowest common denominator. However, I am confident that more specific steps will be taken in the course of this year, leading to an intensified commitment to effective climate action. In whatever we do, we always have to think of the generations coming after us and allocate high priority to the protection of our common house.

Mr. Federal President,

None of us will be able to turn a blind eye to the injustice and inequality suffered by so many, the scandal of hunger in the world, and the poverty millions of people are living in. Nor can we turn our backs on those who flee from armed conflicts and violence, religious hatred, misery and the consequences of climate change in their home countries, often facing a sad and uncertain future.

In this context, we take comfort and inspiration from this year's message on the occasion of the 53rd World Day of Peace delivered by Pope Francis, who never tires in his efforts to promote peace all over the world. The Holy Father encourages us to

strive for a shared political will that serves the cause of peace without ignoring the reality around us. In our capacity as diplomats by profession, we are called upon to foster mutual trust and confidence, to build bridges, so that peace can be strengthened and relations of solidarity developed among countries and peoples.

Believing in the power of dialogue between human beings and between nations, in multilateralism, in the role of international organizations, in diplomacy as an instrument of communication and mutual understanding – this is indispensable in our efforts to build a peaceful world.

It is crucial for us to view humankind as a family and to act as stewards of the Earth, which God has entrusted to us, from generation to generation, to cultivate and bequeath it to our children. We are under the most urgent obligation to reduce the volume of pollutant emissions and adopt a holistic ecological approach: Let us act before it is too late.

Mr. Federal President,
Mr. Federal Minister,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

In conclusion, I should like to thank you, Mr. Federal President, once again for the invitation to today's event. We extend our best wishes for the year 2020 to you, your esteemed spouse, the Members of the Federal Government, especially the Minister of Foreign Affairs, and all your staff. At the same time, we wish to express our heartfelt gratitude for the great support and assistance again received from you during the past year, as has been confirmed to me by many of my colleagues, in such highly competent and generous manner. Your assistance has enabled all of us to further improve the way in which we fulfil our various diplomatic tasks and, in so doing, achieve a lasting effect.

Especially, we wish all Austrians all the best for the new decade, may it be a time of joy, well-being, peace, security and harmony within ourselves and in the world around us.

Thank you very much!