

YOU ARE IN: Under Secretary for Public Diplomacy and Public Affairs > Bureau of Public Affairs > Bureau of Public Affairs: Electronic Information and Publications Office > [Background Notes](#)

Background Note: Holy See

People

December 2008

BUREAU OF EUROPEAN AND EURASIAN AFFAIRS

History



Government

Political Conditions

PROFILE

Economy

OFFICIAL NAME:

[Holy See](#)

Foreign Relations

Note: The Holy See is the universal government of the Catholic Church and operates from the Vatican City State, a sovereign, independent territory of 0.44 square kilometers (0.17 square miles). The Pope is the ruler of both the Vatican City State and the Holy See. The Holy See, as the supreme body of government of the Catholic Church, is a sovereign juridical entity under international law.

U.S. Relations

Travel/Business

Background Notes A-Z

Geography and People

Area: Total of 0.44 sq. km. (109 acres).

Population (July 2008 est.): 824 (citizens and non-citizens). Citizens: 546 (467 of which are resident).

Ethnic groups: Italian, Swiss, other.

Religion: Roman Catholic.

Languages: Italian, Latin, French, various others.

Literacy: 100%.

Work force: 3,000 lay workers (reside outside the Vatican).

Government

Type: Papacy; ecclesiastical, governmental, and administrative capital of the Roman Catholic Church.

Independence: Sovereign entity since medieval times (Lateran Pacts creating the Vatican City State and confirming independence and sovereignty of the Holy See signed with Italy on February 11, 1929).

Suffrage: Limited to Cardinals less than 80 years old.

Economy

Budget: Revenues (2007) \$372 million; expenditures (2007) \$386 million.

Industries: Worldwide banking and financial activities; printing; production of coins, medals, postage stamps, a small amount of mosaics, and staff uniforms. This unique, noncommercial economy is also supported financially by contributions (known as Peter's Pence) from Roman Catholics throughout the world, the sale of postage stamps and tourist mementos, fees from admissions to museums, and the sale of publications. The incomes and living standards of lay workers are comparable to, or somewhat better than, those of counterparts who work in the city of Rome.

PEOPLE AND HISTORY

Almost all of Vatican City's citizens live inside the Vatican's walls. The Vatican includes high-ranking dignitaries, priests, nuns, and guards as well as about 3,000 lay workers who comprise the majority of the work force.

The Holy See's diplomatic history began in the fourth century, but the boundaries of the papacy's temporal power have shifted over the centuries. From the 8th century through the middle of the 19th century, the Popes held sway over the Papal States, which included a broad band of territory across central Italy. In 1860, after prolonged civil and regional unrest, Victor Emmanuel's army seized the Papal States, leaving only Rome and surrounding coastal regions under papal control.

In 1870, Victor Emmanuel captured Rome itself and declared it the new capital of Italy, ending papal claims to temporal power. Pope Pius IX and his successors disputed the legitimacy of these acts and proclaimed themselves to be "prisoners" in the Vatican. Finally, in 1929, the Italian Government and the Holy See signed three agreements resolving the dispute:



Aerial view of the Vatican with St. Peter's Basilica, 2003. [© AP Images]

Cited in Doe v. Holy See,
No. 06-35563 archived on March 19, 2009



A treaty recognizing the independence and sovereignty of the Holy See and creating the State of the Vatican City;

- A concordat defining the relations between the government and the church within Italy; and
- A financial convention providing the Holy See with compensation for its losses in 1870.

A revised concordat, altering the terms of church-state relations, was signed in 1984.

GOVERNMENT AND INSTITUTIONS

The Pope exercises supreme legislative, executive, and judicial power over the Holy See and the State of the Vatican City. Pope Benedict XVI, former Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger of Germany, was elected and invested on April 19 and formally inaugurated on April 24, 2005.

The term "Holy See" refers to the composite of the authority, jurisdiction, and sovereignty vested in the Pope and his advisers to direct the worldwide Roman Catholic Church. As the "central government" of the Roman Catholic Church, the Holy See has a legal personality that allows it to enter into treaties as the juridical equal of a state and to send and receive diplomatic representatives. The Holy See has formal diplomatic relations with 177 nations and the Order of Malta, including the United States and some predominantly Muslim countries. The Holy See also maintains relations of a special nature with the Russian Federation and the Organization for the Liberation of Palestine.

Created in 1929 to provide a territorial identity for the Holy See in Rome, the State of Vatican City is a recognized national territory under international law. The Holy See enters into international agreements and receives and sends diplomatic representatives.

Administration of Vatican City State

The Pope delegates the internal administration of the Vatican City to the Pontifical Commission for the State of Vatican City. Vatican City maintains the Swiss Guards, a voluntary military force, as well as a modern security corps. It has its own post office, commissary, bank, railway station, electrical generating plant, television center, and publishing house. The Vatican also issues its own coins and stamps and has its own Internet domain (.va). Vatican Radio, the official radio station, is one of the most influential in Europe. L'Osservatore Romano is the semi-official newspaper, published daily in Italian, and weekly in English, Spanish, Portuguese, German, and French (plus a monthly edition in Polish). There is also a weekly version published in Italian, as well as a weekly version in Malayalam (a language of India), started on April 3, 2007.

Administration of the Holy See

The Pope exercises his authority through the Roman Curia and the Papal Civil Service. The Roman Curia consists of the Secretariat of State, nine Congregations, three Tribunals, 11 Pontifical Councils, and a complex of offices that administer church affairs at the highest level. The Secretariat of State, under the Cardinal Secretary of State, directs and coordinates the Curia. On September 15, 2006, Pope Benedict XVI appointed Cardinal Tarcisio Bertone as Secretary of State (a role equivalent to that of prime minister) and appointed Archbishop Dominique Mamberti as Secretary for Relations with States (equivalent to foreign minister).

Among the most active of the major Curial institutions are the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, which oversees Church doctrine; the Congregation for Bishops, which coordinates the appointment of bishops worldwide; the Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples, which oversees all missionary activities; and the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, which deals with international peace and social issues.

Three tribunals are responsible for judicial power. The Apostolic Penitentiary deals with matters of conscience; the Roman Rota is responsible for appeals, including annulments of marriage; and the Apostolic Signatura is the final court of appeal.

The Prefecture for Economic Affairs coordinates the finances of the Holy See departments and supervises the administration of the Patrimony of the Holy See, an investment fund formed in 1967 from separate funds dating back to the Lateran Pacts. A committee of 15 cardinals, chaired by the Secretary of State, has final oversight authority over all financial matters of the Holy See, including those of the Institute for Works of Religion, the Vatican bank.

Principal Government Officials

Holy See:

Head of State--Pope Benedict XVI
Secretary of State (Prime Minister)--Cardinal Tarcisio Bertone
Deputy Secretary of State--Archbishop Fernando Filoni
Secretary for Relations with States (Foreign Minister)--Archbishop Dominique Mamberti
Apostolic Nuncio (equivalent to Ambassador) to the United States--Archbishop Pietro Sambi

The Holy See maintains an Apostolic Nunciature, the equivalent of an embassy, in the U.S. at 3339 Massachusetts Ave. NW, Washington, DC 20008, (202) 333-7121.

Vatican City State:

Head of State--Pope Benedict XVI
President of the Vatican City State Governorate--Cardinal Giovanni Lajolo

Papal Audiences

The North American College in Rome, owned and operated by the U.S. Catholic hierarchy for training American priests, handles requests for papal audiences. The address is Casa Santa Maria dell'Umiltà, Via dell'Umiltà 30, 00187, Rome, Italy (tel. 39-06-690-0189).

FOREIGN RELATIONS

The Holy See conducts an active diplomacy. As noted, it maintains formal diplomatic relations with 177 nations and the Order of Malta; 78 of these maintain permanent resident diplomatic missions accredited to the Holy See in Rome. The rest have missions located outside Italy with dual accreditation. The Holy See maintains 106 permanent diplomatic missions to nation-states. Furthermore, the Holy See has two separate permanent diplomatic missions: one to the European Union, another to the Russian Federation.

The Holy See is especially active in international organizations. The Holy See has diplomatic relations with the European Union (EU) in Brussels, it is a permanent

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observer of the United Nations Organization (UN), Organization of American States (OAS) in Washington, African Union (AU), World Tourist Organization (WTO), World Trade Organization (WTO), World Health Organization (WHO), World Food Program (WFP), United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), United Nations Environment Program (UNEP), United Nations International Drug Control Program (UNDCP), United Nations Center for Human Settlements (UNCHS), Latin Union (LU), International Organization for Migration (IOM), International Labor Organization (ILO), International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD), and the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO).

The Holy See is also an observer on an informal basis of the World Meteorological Organization in Geneva (WMO), United Nations Committee of Peaceful Use of Outer Space (UNCOPUOS), International Strategy for Disaster Reduction (ISDR), International Maritime Organization (IMO), African Asian Legal Consultative Committee (AALCC) and the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO).

The Holy See is a member of the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW), Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), International Telecommunication Union (ITU), International Telecommunication Satellite Organization (ITSO), World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO), Universal Postal Union (UPU), International Institute for the Unification of Private Law (UNIDROIT), United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), International Grains Council (IGC), International Committee for Military Medicine (ICMM), International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), and the Preparatory Commission for the Comprehensive Nuclear Test Ban Treaty Organization (CTBTO).

In 1971, the Holy See announced the decision to adhere to the nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) in order to "give its moral support to the principles that form the base of the treaty itself." The Holy See is also a participating state in the OSCE and a guest of honor to the Parliamentary Assembly of the OSCE.

Furthermore, the Holy See has a delegate to the Arab League (AL) in Cairo.

U.S.-HOLY SEE RELATIONS

The United States maintained consular relations with the Papal States from 1797 to 1870 and diplomatic relations with the Pope, in his capacity as head of the Papal States, from 1848 to 1868, though not at the ambassadorial level. These relations lapsed with the loss of all papal territories in 1870.

From 1870 to 1984, the United States did not have diplomatic relations with the Holy See. Several presidents, however, designated personal envoys to visit the Holy See periodically for discussions of international humanitarian and political issues. Myron C. Taylor was the first of these representatives, serving from 1939 to 1950. Presidents Nixon, Ford, Carter, and Reagan also appointed personal envoys to the Pope.

The United States and the Holy See announced the establishment of diplomatic relations on January 10, 1984. On March 7, 1984, the Senate confirmed William A. Wilson as the first U.S. ambassador to the Holy See. Ambassador Wilson had been President Reagan's personal envoy to the Pope since 1981. The Holy See named Archbishop Pio Laghi as the first Apostolic Nuncio (equivalent to ambassador) of the Holy See to the U.S.

The U.S.-Holy See relationship is best characterized as an active global partnership for human dignity. Establishment of diplomatic relations has bolstered the frequent contact and consultation between the United States and the Holy See on many important international issues of mutual interest. The commitment to human dignity at the core of both the U.S. and Holy See approach to the world gives rise to a common agenda for action to promote religious freedom, justice, religious and ethnic tolerance, liberty, respect for women and children and for the rule of law.

Holy See priorities for 2008 include freedom of religion, inter-religious dialogue (particularly with the Muslim world), ecumenism, protection for the traditional family, and peace (particularly for the Middle East). Pope Benedict XVI has also publicly expressed concern over the issue of climate change, describing the protection of the environment as a moral responsibility to safeguard God's creation.

Principal U.S. Embassy Official

Ambassador--Mary Ann Glendon

The [U.S. Embassy](#) to the Holy See is located in Rome in the Villa Domiziana, Via delle Terme Deciane 26, 00153 Rome, Italy, Tel: (396) 4674-3428.

TRAVEL AND BUSINESS INFORMATION

The U.S. Department of State's Consular Information Program advises Americans traveling and residing abroad through Country Specific Information, Travel Alerts, and Travel Warnings. **Country Specific Information** exists for all countries and includes information on entry and exit requirements, currency regulations, health conditions, safety and security, crime, political disturbances, and the addresses of the U.S. embassies and consulates abroad. **Travel Alerts** are issued to disseminate information quickly about terrorist threats and other relatively short-term conditions overseas that pose significant risks to the security of American travelers. **Travel Warnings** are issued when the State Department recommends that Americans avoid travel to a certain country because the situation is dangerous or unstable.

For the latest security information, Americans living and traveling abroad should regularly monitor the Department's Bureau of Consular Affairs Internet web site at <http://www.travel.state.gov>, where the current [Worldwide Caution](#), [Travel Alerts](#), and [Travel Warnings](#) can be found. [Consular Affairs Publications](#), which contain information on obtaining passports and planning a safe trip abroad, are also available at <http://www.travel.state.gov>. For additional information on international travel, see <http://www.usa.gov/Citizen/Topics/Travel/International.shtml>.

The Department of State encourages all U.S. citizens traveling or residing abroad to register via the [State Department's travel registration](#) website or at the nearest U.S. embassy or consulate abroad. Registration will make your presence and whereabouts known in case it is necessary to contact you in an emergency and will enable you to receive up-to-date information on security conditions.

Emergency information concerning Americans traveling abroad may be obtained by calling 1-888-407-4747 toll free in the U.S. and Canada or the regular toll line 1-202-501-4444 for callers outside the U.S. and Canada.

The [National Passport Information Center](#) (NPIC) is the U.S. Department of State's single, centralized public contact center for U.S. passport information. Telephone: 1-877-4-USA-PPT (1-877-487-2778); TDD/TTY: 1-888-874-7793. Passport information is available 24 hours, 7 days a week. You may speak with a representative Monday-Friday, 8 a.m. to 10 p.m., Eastern Time, excluding federal holidays.

Travelers can check the latest health information with the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention in Atlanta, Georgia. A hotline at 800-CDC-INFO (800-232-4636) and a web site at <http://wwwn.cdc.gov/travel/default.aspx> give the most recent health advisories, immunization recommendations or requirements, and advice on food and drinking water safety for regions and countries. The CDC publication "Health Information for International Travel" can be found at <http://wwwn.cdc.gov/travel/contentYellowBook.aspx>.

Further Electronic Information

Department of State Web Site. Available on the Internet at <http://www.state.gov>, the Department of State web site provides timely, global access to official U.S. foreign policy information, including [Background Notes](#) and [daily press briefings](#) along with the directory of [key officers](#) of Foreign Service posts and more. The Overseas Security Advisory Council (OSAC) provides security information and regional news that impact U.S. companies working abroad through its website <http://www.osac.gov>

[Export.gov](#) provides a portal to all export-related assistance and market information offered by the federal government and provides trade leads, free export counseling, help with the export process, and more.

[STAT-USA/Internet](#), a service of the U.S. Department of Commerce, provides authoritative economic, business, and international trade information from the Federal government. The site includes current and historical trade-related releases, international market research, trade opportunities, and country analysis and provides access to the [National Trade Data Bank](#).



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