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Il Santo Padre Giovanni Paolo II ha ricevuto oggi in udienza:

Em.mo Card. Crescenzo Sepe, Prefetto della Congregazione per l'Evangelizzazione dei Popoli.

[00352-01.01]

DICHIARAZIONE DEL CARD. PIO LAGHI

Pubblichiamo di seguito la dichiarazione che l'Em.mo Card. Pio Laghi ha rilasciato ieri al termine dell'incontro con il Presidente degli Stati Uniti d'America George W. Bush:

I was privileged to have been sent by the Holy Father as his Special Envoy to President George Bush. I assured him of the Holy Father's great esteem and affection for the American people and the United States of America.

The purpose of my visit was to deliver a personal message of the Holy Father to the President regarding the Iraqi crisis, to expound upon the Holy See's position and to report on the various initiatives undertaken by the Holy See to contribute to disarmament and peace in the Middle East.

Out of respect for the President and because of the importance of this moment, I am not in a position to discuss the substance of our conversation, nor am I able to release the text of the personal letter of the Holy Father to the President.

The Holy See is urging those in positions of civil authority to take fully into account all aspects of this crisis. In that regard, the Holy See's position has been two-fold. First, the Iraqi government is obliged to fulfill completely and fully its international obligations regarding human rights and disarmament under the UN resolutions with respect for international norms. Second, these obligations and their fulfillment must continue to be pursued within the framework of the United Nations.

The Holy See maintains that there are still peaceful avenues within the context of the vast patrimony of international law and institutions which exist for that purpose. A decision regarding the use of military force can only be taken within the framework of the United Nations, but always taking into account the grave consequences of such an armed conflict: the suffering of the people of Iraq and those involved in the military operation, a further instability in the region and a new gulf between Islam and Christianity.

I want to emphasize that there is great unity on this grave matter on the part of the Holy See, the Bishops in the United States, and the Church throughout the world.

I told the President that today, on Ash Wednesday, Catholics around the world are following the Pope's request to pray and fast for peace this day. The Holy Father himself continues to pray and hope that all leaders who face difficult decisions will be inspired in their search for peace.

[00351-02.01] [Original text: English]
