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Pope rips anti-Christian tide in major foreign policy speech

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Pope Benedict XVI delivers his blessing after reciting the Angelus prayer from the window of his apartment overlooking St. Peter's Square at the Vatican Jan. 9. (CNS photo/Paul Haring)

ANALYSIS

Pope Benedict XVI today devoted his most closely watched annual foreign policy address to religious freedom, especially what many observers see as a rising global tide of anti-Christian hostility. He denounced assaults on Christians in Iraq, Egypt, Nigeria, Pakistan and China, as well as a growing ?marginalization? of Christianity in secular Europe.

While this was hardly the first time a pope has lauded religious freedom, Benedict?s defense of beleaguered Christians was unusually focused ? reflecting a growing conviction in the Vatican that anti-Christian persecution around the world, sometimes referred to as ?Christianophobia,? is taking on epidemic proportions.

How much difference Benedict?s language will make on the ground remains to be seen, but it does clearly confirm that religious freedom, and especially the defense of embattled Christians, has become the Vatican?s supreme diplomatic priority.

?Acts of discrimination against Christians,? the pontiff complained, frequently ?are considered less grave and less worthy of attention on the part of governments and public opinion.?

The remarks came in Benedict?s annual address to the diplomatic corps accredited to the Holy See, considered the pope?s most important foreign policy speech of the year. The Holy See currently has diplomatic relations with 178 nations and the European Union, as well as special observer status at the United Nations.

Read the full story: **Pope rips anti-Christian tide in major foreign policy speech** [1]

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