

Large British delegation to meet the Pope.



One of the biggest ever British government delegations is to visit the Vatican and meet the Pope next week. The visit, which will be led by Baroness Warsi, Cabinet Minister without Portfolio, follows the success of Benedict XVI's visit to the UK in Sept 2010.

The British delegation will discuss climate change, arms proliferation, religious tolerance, interfaith dialogue and the crisis in Somalia and the Horn of Africa with the Pope and Vatican officials.

"It's a very strong delegation and it's a way of showing that the relationship with the Holy See didn't end in a blaze of fireworks when the Pope's visit finished," said a Vatican observer.

"It's one of the most comprehensive British visits ever in terms of the range of interests represented. When the Pope gave his annual speech to the diplomatic corps in Rome last month the one country he mentioned by name was Somalia, expressing hope that the international community can tackle the problems in the Horn of Africa."

The discussions on Somalia will come ahead of the British government hosting an international

conference on the lawless country in London later this month.

The Vatican visit will also mark the 30th anniversary of the establishment of full diplomatic relations between the United Kingdom and the Holy See.

After the schism with Rome under Henry VIII in the early 16th century, Britain re-established limited diplomatic relations in 1914 but they were not fully upgraded to ambassador level until 1982.

Baroness Warsi will be accompanied by six ministers for the Feb 14-15 visit, including Jeremy Hunt, the Secretary of State for Culture, Olympics, Media and Sport; Alan Duncan, the Minister for International Development; and Greg Barker, the Energy and Climate Change Minister.

They will be accompanied by The Most Reverend Vincent Nichols, the Archbishop of Westminster.

Baroness Warsi will deliver an address to the Pontifical Ecclesiastical Academy, a Vatican institution, on the subject of the place of religion in modern political discourse.

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