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The United States Conference of Mayors Mission to Rome

Conference of Mayors President, Mayor James A. Garner of Hempstead, NY Officially Greets His Holiness Pope John Paul II at the Vatican

Rome, Italy – Today, The United States Conference of Mayors (USCM) President and Hempstead, New York Mayor James A. Garner officially greeted **His Holiness Pope John Paul II** during the General Papal Audience in St. Peter's Square at the Vatican.

Mayor Garner said, "It was great to speak with the Holy Father today. I am grateful that I had the opportunity to tell him about The United States Conference of Mayors' Mission to Africa, and the pain and suffering we witnessed as a result of the number of people in Africa living with HIV/AIDS. Furthermore, today's occasion was special because it was also a celebration of the Holy Father's birthday. Meeting someone of his stature was very meaningful to me; this is an experience I will never forget."

On Tuesday, Mayor Garner and Conference Executive Director Tom Cochran met with **His Eminence Cardinal Francis Arinze at the Vatican** to report on the Conference of Mayors four-nation mission to Africa last year, which also focused on the devastation of the HIV/AIDS pandemic.

"Our visit with Cardinal Arinze was extremely productive. We discussed our Mission to Africa and thanked him for the tremendous role the Catholic Church has played in helping those affected by the HIV/AIDS pandemic in the nations of Africa. He was pleased to hear that we had met with 40 African mayors during our mission last summer; and was especially touched since he is originally from Nigeria," Mayor Garner said.

"I also expressed to Cardinal Arinze that The United States Conference of Mayors wants to work with the Vatican to further address the HIV/AIDS pandemic on the Continent," he concluded.

The United States Conference of Mayors *Mission to Africa*, which was the largest mission undertaken in the history of the Conference, allowed U.S.A. mayors to share their experiences with African mayors and build collaborative partnerships between U.S. cities and African cities in response to the devastating impact of the AIDS pandemic in Africa. The Conference of Mayors delegation traveled to four African nations: South Africa, Namibia, Swaziland and Uganda.

About The U.S. Conference of Mayors:

The U.S. Conference of Mayors is the official nonpartisan organization of the nation's 1183 cities with populations of 30,000 or more. Each city is represented in the Conference by its chief elected official - the mayor. For more information about The United States Conference of Mayors, visit www.usmayors.org.