

Brief statement by Amb. J. Enkhsaikhan of Mongolia  
at the ceremony of presentation of Gerege to UNOV on 12 May 2011

Mr. Director-General,

Allow me to thank you, Mr. Fedotov, Director-General and the UNOV staff for co-organizing this event and all of you for your presence.

2011 is a very special year for Mongolia. This year we Mongolians are commemorating the 2220<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the founding of the first state on the Mongolian territory – the Hun Empire, 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Mongolia's national freedom movement and the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the membership to the United Nations. In this sense, I believe that the display of “Gerege” at the UN Center here in Vienna, an important venue for international affairs, is both significant and timely.

For many the word ‘Mongolia’ may evoke a vague picture of warriors on horses galloping through the vast territory stretching from Asia to Europe in the 13<sup>th</sup> century. For some, it may evoke a history of past domination, while for others – a period of greater interaction among peoples of the East and West made possible by the “silk road”. No one who knows history is indifferent regarding the role of Mongols in that period of history. The “Gerege” that is being placed here in the Rotunda, the gift of the Government of Mongolia, is a testimony to the role of Mongols and their efficient way of communication. Together with religious tolerance, the “silk road” and the Great Yasa, the codified traditional common law of the Mongol tribes that has brought a long period of relative law and order on vast territories of Asia and Europe, to mention a few, the Gerege was one of the legacies of Mongols in history.

The origin of “Gerege” dates back to the 3<sup>rd</sup> century B.C, the times of Hunnu and Kidan Empires of Mongolia. The messengers sent to far away places carried “tablets” with the Khaan’s decree that bestowed upon them the needed authority. As noted by historians, there were different categories of Gereges, made of gold, silver and bronze all with inscriptions in ancient Mongolian, Kidan and Sinitic scripts and images of tiger and falcons underlining the power of the Khaan.

The importance and the need of “Gerege” grew especially during the time of the Great Mongol Empire. Combined with a sophisticated messenger system established throughout the empire at the time, the Gerege played an important role by providing protection, immunity and means of transportation – horses, food and lodging throughout the mission. The Khaan’s messenger was expected to ride for up to 400 kilometers on the first day and almost 300 on the second day of the mission which enabled the message to reach Karakorum, capital of the Empire of vice versa, in short time. Upon arrival, the messenger was expected to convey the information or message to the addressee and only then was he allowed to retire or rest. Special envoys, not messengers, known in Mongolian as “amban said” (virtual translation into English is ‘plenipotentiary minister’ but known more as ambassador) were empowered to negotiate on behalf of the Khaan with foreign sovereigns. Any harm to them was harshly punished, even to the extent of military punitive actions.

Gereges were also used as safe passages for VIPs. Thus Marco Polo, the Venetian traveler who served Khubilai Khaan for two decades, was granted a golden Gerege when he departed for his native Venice. In his book he described in detail the utility of the Gerege throughout the empire.

I should note that the Gerege and the messenger system provided the Great Mongol Empire with the most effective communication network known at that time. Furthermore, the expansion of the Mongol Empire and the messenger network promoted a free movement of merchants between Asia and Europe by designating and protecting “silk roads”. Some scholars even identify it as the GATT system of the Medieval Age.

It could be said that the Gerege was a prototype of the modern day diplomatic passport and even a credit card giving the bearer the required immunity and providing him with the needed services to accomplish the mission.

It is our pleasure to display the Gerege here at the Rotunda not only because it is from Mongolia but because it served as a source of immunity and protection for un-impeded inter-state relations many centuries ago.