COLUMBAN CENTRE FOR CHRISTIAN-MUSLIM RELATIONS

Bridges

Building relationships between Christians and Muslims

No. 103 June 2024

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From the Editor

We are individually powerless to stop the Israeli war cabinet's relentless attacks which cause the deaths of innocent Palestinians.

We are individually powerless to stop Hamas's calculated sacrificing of Palestinians for political ends.

But there are three things in our power:

1. We can try to keep our hearts free from rage, revenge, and hatred towards all perpetrators of such blatant inhumanity by insisting on the equal human dignity of all people.
2. We can continue – or create – interfaith friendships in our local circle of influence.
3. We can pray to Almighty God to bring an immediate end to the violence, humanitarian aid to those in desperate need, the release of hostages and prisoners, and a just and lasting settlement of the decades-long underlying issues of dispossession, autonomy, and security.

The following prayer is appropriate:

O God, you are the source of life and peace.

Praised be your name forever.

You turn our minds and hearts to thoughts of peace, of brotherhood.

Our world is passing through so many crises.

Hear our prayer, your power changes hearts.

Jews, Christians, and Muslims profoundly affirm that they are followers of the one God, children of one Father, brothers and sisters.

May all nations seek the way of peace together.

Help us give witness to this truth by the way we live.

Give us understanding, mercy, forgiveness.

Help us live in your law of love.

Amen

(Adapted from bit.ly/3wDHOWi).

REV DR PATRICK MCINERNEY

Multi-Faith Community Iftar

On 19 March 2024, the Columban Centre for Christian-Muslim Relations and the Diocese of Parramatta co-hosted their annual Multi-Faith Community Iftar at the Novotel in Parramatta. More than 100 people representing Jewish, Christian, Muslim, Baha'i, and Hindu faiths, local and state government leaders, and representatives of education and community organisations attended. The theme was "Building Bridges Between Believers from Different Religions", inspired by the interfaith charter *The Sydney Statement*. Mindful of the numerous global conflicts, **Fr Patrick McInerney**, in his welcome address, provided a sobering reminder that this year's Iftar was not a celebration, stating that many of us were "painfully aware of the many conflicts and wars going on in our world". He galvanised the audience by quoting a 17th century Punjabi Sufi poet, whose verse initially sounds iconoclastic, but then affirms universal human dignity. Bishop Vincent Long OFM Conv, Bishop of Parramatta, and Dr Mahsheed Ansari, Higher Degrees Coordinator and Senior Lecturer in Islamic Studies at the Centre for Islamic Studies and Civilisation at Charles Sturt University, were keynote speakers. Neither of them shied away from acknowledging the challenges of the Israel-Hamas war, highlighting that we must persevere with bridge building even more so when there are tensions in wartime.

Eid al-Fitr

We made our presence felt on *Eid al-Fitr* on 10 April 2024. **Fr Patrick McInerney** attended the *Eid* Prayers at Lakemba and Auburn, and **Kim Chong** attended Darul Imaan Mosque in Wolli Creek. Since state and federal governments have expressed support for Israel, there was no VIP reception at Lakemba and no politicians! Muslim leaders have boycotted them until the Israel-Hamas war ends. Later, Fr Patrick had breakfast with the Mufti and his entourage. The following day, he attended *Eid* Prayers with the Shia community at Merrylands. On the evening of the 9th (Muslim feasts begin on the evening before, much like the Jewish sabbath and the Saturday evening vigil mass for Catholics), Fr Patrick and Kim posted an *Eid* video and a greeting on Facebook. During the day they responded to and added many festive greetings to others' *Eid* posts. They also e-mailed the Vatican's Dicastery for Interreligious Dialogue *Message for Ramadan 2024* to about 230 Muslim imams and community leaders and members, and handed out about 120 *Eid* cards and hard copies of the *Message* to those who attended the *Eid* Prayers.

Lailat al-Qadr

Muslims believe that God revealed the Holy Qur'an to the Prophet Muhammad on *Lailat al-Qadr* (The Night of Power/Destiny) during the month of Ramadan 610CE. It is considered a very auspicious night – "better than a thousand months" – a night of blessings, of intercession, of peace, when God stoops down to hear and answer prayers. To avail of this blessed opportunity, many Muslims spend a portion of the night or even the whole night in prayer. At 10.00 pm on the 6th of April, **Fr Patrick McInerney** joined the thousands of Muslims gathered in the Lakemba mosque, a lone Christian among the throng of Muslim worshippers, all united in prayer to the one God Who is Creator and Merciful Judge. *For Quranic reference and detailed explanation see Facebook post: bit.ly/3UBXkKi.*

Women's Peace Symposium

On 28 April 2024, **Kim Chong** gave a speech on interfaith dialogue and human rights in Catholic social teaching at a women's Peace Symposium hosted by the Women's Auxiliary of the Ahmadiyya Muslim Community Australia. Kim highlighted the dignity of the human person as fundamental to human rights. She emphasised that Church teachings and the Bible teach us that *all* human beings are loved and made by God, that we are all equal, precious, and valuable. She also drew on the Gospel of Matthew and its message of the Golden Rule, "to love your neighbour as yourself", which includes our Muslim, Jewish, Hindu, Sikh, Buddhist, and Baha'i neighbours, as well as those of secular worldviews. Kim then described her own enriching experiences of interfaith dialogue, particularly with her Muslim sisters and brothers.

Faith Leaders Call for Calm, Respect, Harmony

The false accusations on social media in reaction to the Westfield Bondi Junction stabbings on 13 April 2024 exacerbated tensions already stretched to breaking point. The vigilante mob and threats of retaliation after the alleged stabbing attack at Christ the Good Shepherd Church Wakeley on 15 April 2024 further heightened fears and anxieties. In this volatile atmosphere, **Fr Patrick McInerney** was happy to join Muslim and Jewish leaders in a media release (right) appealing for respect and community harmony. He was also interviewed by SBS radio. The NSW Faith Affairs Council and Faith Leaders also issued a statement. Politicians have acknowledged the important role that faith leaders played in defusing communal tensions that could easily have gotten out of hand. *For media release see: bit.ly/3JHkz0g. For SBS podcast see: bit.ly/3UD6M1n. For NSW Faith Affairs Council statement see: bit.ly/3Ray4dp.*

ISLAMOPHOBIA REGISTER · JEWISH COUNCIL

Joint Jewish, Muslim, Christian Statement on Recent Tensions and Violence in Sydney

Friday 19 April 2024

We, the Jewish Council of Australia, the Islamophobia Register Australia, and the Columban Centre for Christian-Muslim Relations, are deeply concerned by the heightened tensions and acts of violence that have occurred in Sydney over the past week. We extend our deepest condolences to the victims, family members and all those affected by the tragic mass stabbing incident at Bondi last Saturday and to the Church community of Wakely's Christ The Good Shepherd Church and the Assyrian community more broadly, after a shocking incident at the church where four people including a Bishop were alleged to have been stabbed. This attack triggered further violence outside the church directed at paramedics and police.

Recent days have shown that fear and misinformation can spread rapidly in the wake of such events. We must reject any attempts to use these incidents to perpetuate antisemitism, Islamophobia or any form of racism, hatred or intolerance. Instead, we must come together to support one another, amplify facts over falsehoods, and demonstrate the strength of our shared values of inclusivity and mutual understanding.

Unfortunately some community leaders, media and politicians have fostered community division and racism. This must end now. People of different faiths and backgrounds must not be demonised or dehumanised.

Now is the time to work towards ensuring that Sydney is a place where people of all backgrounds and religions can feel safe, welcomed, and empowered to build a better future together. We stand ready to work with all who share this vision for a pluralistic, just, and multicultural, multi-faith society.

Abraham Conference Multi-Faith Prayer Vigil

On 2 May 2024, **Kim Chong**, along with her fellow members of the Abraham Conference Organising Committee, hosted a Multi-Faith Prayer Vigil at St Patrick's Cathedral in Parramatta to remember and honour the victims of recent tragedies in Sydney. For the vigil, the Organising Committee gathered believers not only from the Abrahamic faiths but people of all faiths, to pray for the victims of the stabbings in Bondi, for Bishop Mar Mari Emmanuel of the Assyrian Orthodox Church in Wakeley, and the victims of domestic violence. The vigil began with **Fr Patrick McInerney**, Rabbi Jacqui Ninio from the Jewish faith, and Ahmet Polat from the Muslim faith, together lighting a candle and holding it aloft while announcing the word "peace" in Hebrew (*shalom*), Latin (*pax vobiscum)* and Arabic (*salam*) to the 50 attendees present. Chair of the Abraham Conference Organising Committee, Rev Dr Manas Ghosh from the Uniting Church, led the event. This was followed by readings from the Abrahamic faiths' respective scriptures as well as prayers for compassion and healing, each followed by a moment of silence. Representatives from the Baha'i, Buddhist, Hindu, Jain, and Sikh faiths also offered prayers of peace. Attendees appreciated the opportunity to come together and pray in these challenging times. *Read more in* AMUST *at bit.ly/3yoGDL5.*

Museum to be Dedicated to Dialogue

The Elijah Interfaith Institute in Jerusalem has announced it will build a museum in Assisi, Italy, dedicated to interreligious dialogue, called The Global House of Friendship and Hope. Developed by the institute's founder, Rabbi Alon Goshen, and supported by the Catholic Church and leaders of other religions, the museum will promote friendship across different faiths. Rabbi Goshen emphasised that "you can't have peace without friendship". He explained, "With the recent events following October 7, many people turn to me and say, so, have all your relations come to a standstill? Not at all [...] the reason is that once friendship is deeply established, things from the outside are not going to shake it up." The museum will comprise of various interactive spaces where vistors can explore the development of friendship among leaders of different faiths; delve deeply into St Francis of Assisi's meeting with Sultan al-Malik al-Kamil of Egypt; experience in virtual reality prayer experiences among different religions; and visit faith-specific prayer rooms, among others. According to its website, "the faithful can expand their sense of devotion, while broadening hearts and minds to other religions, recognising deeper spiritual commonalities". *Condensed and adapted from bit.ly/3JRj2oJ.*

Pope Hosts Christian-Muslim Colloquium

On 4 April 2024, Muslim and Christians attended a colloquium at the Vatican, sponsored by the Dicastery for Interreligious Dialogue, the Kazakhstan-based Congress of Leaders of World and Traditional Religions, the Kazakh Senate, and the Nursultán Nazarbáyev Center for Development of Interfaith and Intercivilization Dialogue. In his address to the participants, Pope Francis said he hoped the colloquium "marked by respect for differences" would be "an example of not seeing the other person as a threat but as a gift and a valued partner for reciprocal growth". In a world filled with "bellicose rhetoric", religious leaders must make extra efforts to speak of peace and to nurture every action and attitude that lessens tensions and increases dialogue, Pope Francis continued. The theme of the meeting in Rome was "Our Common Home: A Divine Gift to be Loved and Cared for", which the pope said was an important topic for interreligious dialogue, because "respect for creation is an indispensable consequence of love for the Creator, for our brothers and sisters with whom we share life on this planet". *Condensed and adapted from bit.ly/3wmCJS3.*

New Secretary General of Religions for Peace

Congratulations to Dr Francis Kuria Kagema on his recent appointment as Secretary General of the World Council of Religions for Peace (RfP) International. He brings a wealth of multi-religious leadership experience to his new role. He has served as Secretary General of the African Council of Religious Leaders-RfP and is the former Executive Director of the Interreligious Council of Kenya (IRCK-RfP), a position he has held since 2008. Religions for Peace is an international interfaith organisation that has been working for more than 50 years at local and global levels, harnessing the resources of the world's religions to address pressing social issues. *For announcement see bit.ly/44NeoBV. For Religions for Peace see rfp.org.*

Sydney Reeling from Stabbing Attacks

In April, Sydney residents were profoundly shocked and overwhelmed by two public stabbing attacks in a matter of days. On 13 April, six people were killed, while a further 12 people, including a baby, were seriously injured when they were randomly attacked as they went about their shopping at Bondi Westfield Junction. Of the 18 people stabbed, 17 were women. The killer, Joel Cauchi, 40, was shot and killed by a police officer in response to the attack. Cauchi had no known motive but it was later declared that the attacks were likely related to his mental health. Just two days later, on the evening of 15 April, a 16-year-old male allegedly stabbed Bishop Mar Mari Emmanuel while he was delivering a sermon at the Christ The Good Shepherd Church in Wakeley, which was also being live streamed. Father Isaac Royel was also injured in the altercation. Following the attack, a large angry crowd soon gathered outside the church, with multiple police injured as they tried to restore order.

Prof Mohammed Abu-Nimer awarded Niwano Peace Prize

Congratulations to Palestinian-American academic Professor Mohammed Abu-Nimer, who has been awarded the Niwano Peace Prize, the Nobel Prize for Religions, in recognition of his lifelong commitment to peace and interfaith dialogue. The Niwano Peace Prize is for those who significantly contribute to interreligious cooperation and fostering global peace. The Committee emphasised Abu-Nimer's contribution to integrating "education with conflict resolution and peace-building activities, particularly through his profound understanding of forgiveness and reconciliation in Islam". His contribution is not only theoretical, but is applied "effectively in practice" and has greater significance today "in the light of the ongoing conflict" in his homelands, Israel and Palestine, where "one of the region's most devastating wars" is taking place. That is why, the Committee notes, there is "no more fitting and timely recipient for this year's Niwano Peace Prize". The award was presented in a ceremony in Tokyo, Japan, on 14 May 2024. *For official commendation see bit.ly/44IFvOr. For media reports see bit.ly/3WHq2CP, bit.ly/4amhhKV and bit.ly/4bJDF24.*

Interfaith Celebration of Easter and Eid

On 14 April 2024, Bishop Azad Marshall, Diocese of Raiwind Church of Pakistan, hosted an interfaith celebration of Easter and *Eid al-Fitr*. Guests included religious leaders, political figures, government ministers, media representatives, and other prominent members of society. In his welcoming address, Bishop Marshall emphasised the themes of fasting, reflection, renewal, and joy that unite believers from different faith communities in celebrating religious feasts. Political leaders stressed the government's commitment to addressing the issues faced by minority communities and treating all as equal and valued citizens. The Most Rev Justin Welby, Archbishop of Canterbury, emphasised the importance of forming friendships and fostering peace across religions, and commended the gathering as a symbol of mutual hospitality across faith communities. The event served as a poignant reminder of the power of dialogue, understanding, and cooperation in building a harmonious and inclusive society. *Condensed and adapted from bit.ly/4dN5sR5.*

Extinguish the Fire of War and Light the Candle of Peace

Vatican message for the month of Ramadan and Eid Al-Fitr 1445 AH/2024 AD

Dear Muslim brothers and sisters, *From the Vatican, 11 March 2024*

Once again we greet you on the occasion of the month of Ramadan with a message of closeness and friendship, aware of the importance of this month for your spiritual journey and for your family and social life, which also embraces your Christian friends and neighbours.

We are pleased to know that our yearly Message to you for Ramadan is an important means of strengthening and building good relations between Christians and Muslims, thanks to its diffusion through traditional and modern media, particularly social media. For this reason, it would be beneficial to make this Message better known among both communities.

We would have liked to share with you some considerations on a different theme from the one we have chosen to address. Yet the growing number of conflicts in these days, ranging from military combat to armed clashes of varying intensity involving states, criminal organizations, armed gangs and civilians, has become truly alarming. Pope Francis recently observed that this increase in hostilities is in fact transforming "a third world war fought piecemeal" into "a genuine global conflict". The causes of these conflicts are many, some long-standing, others more recent. Together with the perennial human desire for domination, geo-political ambitions and economic interests, a major cause is surely the continuing production and commerce in arms. Even as part of our human family suffers grievously from the devastating effects of the use of these arms in warfare, others cynically rejoice in the great economic profit deriving from this immoral commerce. Pope Francis has described this as dipping a morsel of bread in the blood of our brother.

At the same time, we can be thankful that we also possess immense human and religious resources for advancing peace. The desire for peace and security is profoundly rooted in the soul of every person of good will, since no one can fail to see the tragic effects of war in the loss of human lives, the toll of serious injury and the throngs of orphans and widows. The destruction of infrastructure and property makes life hopelessly difficult, if not impossible. Sometimes hundreds of thousands of people are displaced in their own country or forced to flee to other countries as refugees. Consequently, the condemnation and rejection of war should be unambiguous: every war is fratricide, useless, senseless, and dark. In war, everyone loses. Once again, in the words of Pope Francis: "No war is holy, only peace is holy". All religions, each in their own way, consider human life sacred and thus worthy of respect and protection. The states that permit and practise capital punishment are, fortunately, becoming fewer each year. A reawakened sense of the respect for this fundamental dignity of the gift of life will contribute to the conviction that war must be rejected and peace cherished.

Albeit with their differences, religions acknowledge the existence and the important role of conscience. Forming consciences to respect the absolute value of the life of each person and his or her right to physical integrity, security and a dignified life will likewise contribute to the condemnation and rejection of war, any war and all wars. We look to the Almighty as God of peace, the source of peace, who in a special way loves all those who devote their lives to the service of peace. Like so many things, peace is a divine gift but at the same time the fruit of human efforts, especially in preparing the conditions necessary for its establishment and preservation. As believers, we are also witnesses to hope, as we recalled in our 2021 Message for Ramadan: "Christians and Muslims: Witnesses of Hope". Hope can be symbolized by a candle, whose light radiates security and joy, whereas fire, uncontrolled, can lead to the destruction of fauna and flora, infrastructure and the loss of human lives.

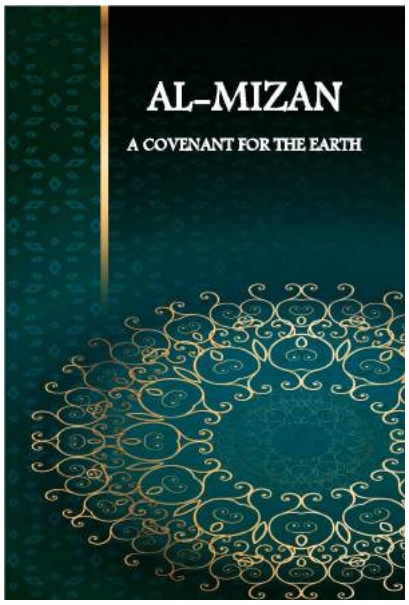
Dear Muslim brothers and sisters, let us join in extinguishing the fires of hatred, violence and war, and instead light the gentle candle of peace, drawing upon resources for peace that are present in our rich human and religious traditions. May your fasting and other pious practices during Ramadan and the celebration of Eid al-Fitr that concludes it, bring you abundant fruits of peace, hope and joy.

Miguel Ángel Cardinal Ayuso Guixot, MCCJ
President

Msgr Indunil Kodithuwakku Jaakaratne Kankanamalage
Secretary

Muslim Scholars Release Document for Ecology

Islamic outlook on ecological responsibility released in landmark document



Muslim scholars from across the globe and different Islamic backgrounds, among them leading Islamic eco-theologians and practitioners, launched a landmark document at the sixth session of the United Nations Environment Assembly in February 2024 at UNEP headquarters in Nairobi, Kenya.

The document, *Al-Mizan: A Covenant for the Earth*, presents a comprehensive Islamic outlook on ecological and moral responsibility. It underscores Islamic teaching that all creatures have inherent value and reflect divine presence, leading its authors to label the destruction of ecosystems and species extinctions by humans as "ecocide" and analogous to genocide and crimes against humanity.

The document urges collective action to combat climate change, biodiversity loss, pollution, and protect our planet. Described as a "Muslim sibling" to Pope Francis' ecological encyclical *Laudato Si'* , it emphasises that the Islamic faith tradition requires active stewardship of creation.

Among the numerous calls to action in *Al-Mizan* is:

- Endorsement of the Fossil Fuel Non-Proliferation Treaty, a framework that will enable countries to negotiate the phasing out of fossil fuel production in a way that is just, fair, and transparent, and to commit to an equitable transition for affected workers and climate-vulnerable communities. The current call for a 'transitioning away' from fossil fuels is a far cry from the Treaty's 'phasing out' of fossil fuels. Scientists and the UN Secretary General, among others, have warned that the failure to call for a *phasing out* of fossil fuels is devastating and dangerous given the urgent need for action to tackle pollution and the climate emergency.

Along with governments and businesses, the authors called on the global Muslim community, the world's fastest-growing religious group which makes up roughly a quarter of the world's population, to contribute "at least a fifth part" to resolving the multiple environmental crises facing the globe. That includes establishing a new academy and programs and instituting a decade-long initiative to put the teachings of the new text into action in cities, universities, mosques and more.

"The gravity of the looming environmental crisis threatens to eclipse all other crises in human history," the scholars wrote. "Its effects make no distinction between race, religion, culture, or the lines we draw on maps. It should remind us that we are irrevocably connected with the Lord of all in the natural world."

The Parliament of the World's Religions trustee and member of its Climate Action Task Force, Imam Saffet Catovic, who is the director of the United Nations Operations for Justice For All, a member of the scholars drafting team and a contributing author of *Al-Mizan*, stated on the historic occasion of its global launch:

"*Al-Mizan* has often been compared to Pope Francis's *Laudato Si'*, which expresses the ecological and environmental teachings of Christianity, the largest community of faith on Earth; *Al-Mizan* expresses the ecological and environmental teachings of Islam, the community of faith that is poised, in light of population trends, to become the largest community of faith on Earth. Together, the adherents to these two faith traditions represent over half of humankind."

Four years in the making, the document was led by the Islamic Foundation for Ecology and Environmental Sciences, based in the United Kingdom, and facilitated by the U.N. Environment Program's Faith for Earth Coalition. It was drafted by a team of 12 Islamic scholars, including two women, specialising in environmental issues from around the globe, and in consultation with 300-plus Islamic and international organisations. *Al-Mizan* envisions the possibility of coalitions and collaborations of religious and spiritual traditions, indigenous peoples, of religious and scientific thinkers to seek solutions.

Condensed and adapted from bit.ly/4bGaqpz and bit.ly/44IxgSz.

Pope Francis to Nigerian Catholics in Rome

Gratitude, richness in diversity and dialogue: three reflections of the Pope

On 25 March 2024, Pope Francis marked the 25th anniversary of the Nigerian Catholic community in Rome. Below is an excerpt from his speech in which he addressed three elements vital for the life of that community: gratitude, richness in diversity, and dialogue.

Gratitude

First of all, gratitude. I thank you for all that you have done and continue to do in bearing witness to the joyful message of the Gospel.

I join you as well in thanksgiving to Almighty God for the numerous young people from Nigeria who have heard the Lord's call to the priesthood and the consecrated life and have responded with generosity, humility, and perseverance.

Some are among you here, young priests and young sisters. Indeed, each follower of Jesus, according to his or her particular vocation, is entrusted with the responsibility of serving God and neighbour in love, making Christ present in the lives of our brothers and sisters.

May you always be missionary disciples, grateful that the Lord has chosen you to follow him and has sent you forth to proclaim our faith with zeal and contribute to building a more just and humane world.

Diversity

Second, richness in diversity. Here, I would say that the diversity of ethnicities, cultural traditions, and languages in your nation is not a problem but a gift that enriches the fabric of both the Church and the larger society and allows you to promote the values of mutual understanding and coexistence. It is my hope that your community here in Rome, in welcoming and accompanying the Nigerian faithful and other believers, will always resemble a great and inclusive family in which all can use their different gifts and talents, that are fruits of the Holy Spirit, to support and strengthen one another in moments of joy and sorrow, success and difficulty. By doing so, you will be able to sow the seeds of social friendship and concord for both present and future generations.

Yet it is important to be attentive to a danger, the danger of being closed in, of not being universal but being closed off – here I would say – in a 'tribal' isolation. No. Your roots become closed, isolated in this 'tribal' and not universal, not communal, attitude. Community yes, 'tribe' no. This is very important. And it applies to all of us, to everyone, each according to his or her position. Universality does not mean locking oneself into one's own culture. True, one's own culture is a gift, yet not to close it off, but to give it, to offer it. Universal, universality.

Dialogue

Finally, dear brothers and sisters, dialogue. Sadly, many regions of the world are experiencing conflict and suffering, and Nigeria, too, is living through a period of hardship. In assuring you of my prayers for the security, unity, and spiritual and economic progress of your nation, I also invite everyone to foster dialogue and listen to one another with open hearts, excluding no one at the political, social, and religious levels. Integrating, dialoguing, universalising, always starting from one's own identity. At the same time, I encourage you to be heralds of the Lord's great mercy, working for reconciliation among all your brothers and sisters, helping to ease the burdens of the poor and those most in need and adopting as your own God's style of closeness, compassion, and tender love. In this way, all Nigerians can continue to walk together in fraternal solidarity and harmony. *For details see bit.ly/3QNNZxT.*

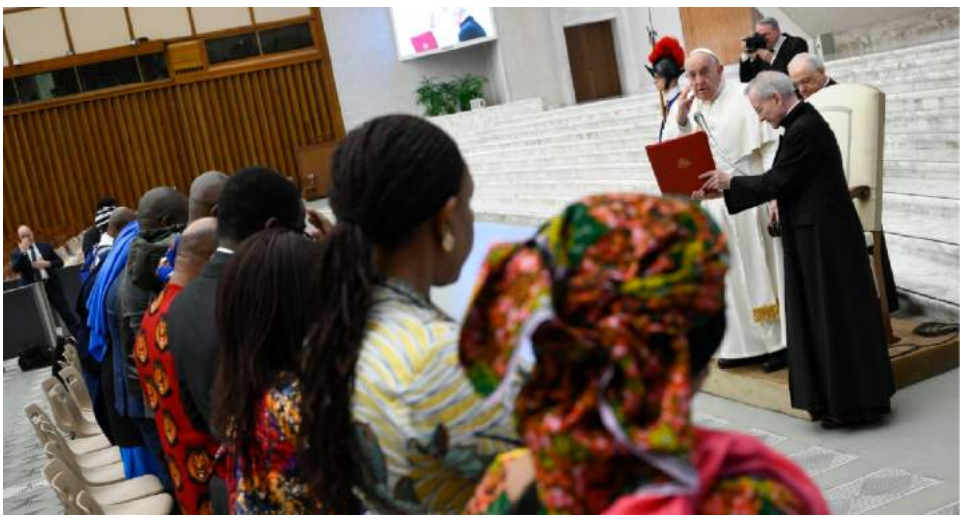


Photo: Vatican Media

Workshop on Interreligious Dialogue in Africa

Statement on Christianity in dialogue with Islam and African traditional religion

On 9-10 April 2024, the Dicastery for Interreligious Dialogue, coordinators of Bishops' Commissions for Interreligious Dialogue in Africa, and pastoral workers in this field across the continent, held a workshop in Nairobi, Kenya, on Christianity in Dialogue with Islam and African Traditional Religion: Challenges and Opportunities. Below is an excerpt from their final statement:

We recognise the diversity of the African continent. Our religious, social, and cultural values emphasise relationships, hospitality, solidarity, conviviality, and the inclusion of all religious ideas and worldviews (cf. *Africae Munus*, 92; *Ecclesia in Africa*, 42-43). This innate religious disposition of the African people can serve as a common ground for building a culture of peace with all men and women. We further recognise that "Intolerance and lack of respect for indigenous popular cultures is a form of violence grounded in a cold and judgmental way of viewing them. No authentic, profound, and enduring change is possible unless it starts from the different cultures, particularly those of the poor… The different religions, based on their respect for each human person as a creature called to be a child of God, contribute significantly to building fraternity and defending justice in society" (*Fratelli Tutti*, 220, 271).

We are concerned over the increasing polarisation, tensions, conflicts and religious radicalisation in certain African countries, particularly in West, Central and East Africa, that can be attributed to various factors, including socio-economic and political ones. This situation worsens when some individuals and groups instrumentalise religion. These elements weaken "the human family's innate vocation to fraternity" (*Fratelli Tutti*, 26) and undermine conviviality among diverse social and religious groups. They also hinder the efforts of the Church in Africa and of other religious communities to promote constructive interreligious dialogue.

We are conscious of the mission entrusted to us by the Lord Jesus Christ through the Church (cf. Mt 28:128-20) as the "seed and beginning" of the Kingdom (cf. *Lumen Gentium*, 5) as we put into practice the Church's magisterial teachings, especially the declaration *Nostra Aetate* (1965), the post-synodal apostolic exhortations *Ecclesia in Africa* (1995) and *Africae Munus* (2011) and the Encyclical Letter *Fratelli Tutti* (2020). The Church regards the moral and religious values of the African traditions with great respect. For us, interreligious dialogue is an effective means to root out ignorance about other religious traditions, promote mutual respect and preserve the values that foster religious and cultural diversity and the dignity of every human being.

We are convinced that "interreligious dialogue is fundamental to the Church, which is called to collaborate in God's plan with her methods of presence, respect and love towards all persons" (cf. *Dialogue and Mission*, 39). Interreligious dialogue and the proclamation of the Gospel, though not on the same level and not mutually exclusive, are authentic elements of the Church's evangelising mission. In order to fulfil this mission, every Christian is called to participate in these two activities (cf. *Dialogue and Mission*, 77, 82; *Ecclesia in Africa*, 65-67).

"For us, the wellspring of human dignity and fraternity is in the Gospel of Jesus Christ. From it, there arises, 'for Christian thought and for the action of the Church, the primacy given to relationship, to the encounter with the sacred mystery of the other, to universal communion with the entire human family, as a vocation of all'" (*Fratelli Tutti*, 277).

The goal of evangelisation in Africa is "to build up the Church as the Family of God" (*Ecclesia in Africa*, 85), where we acknowledge and accept each other as sisters and brothers, and faithfully and lovingly witnesses to the Risen Lord Jesus while reaching out to the people of other faiths and all people of good will (cf. Lk 2:14; *Laudato Sì*, 3, 62). *For full text see bit.ly/4bHsRBz. For media reports see bit.ly/3wEyNwf and bit.ly/4bECWiE.*

Interreligious Education Key, says Monsignor

Religions are called to a shared path for the good of humanity

Monsignor Paolo Martinelli (pictured), Apostolic Vicar of Southern Arabia, has emphasised the neccessity of interreligious education in his address at the Convening of Champions: Ethics Education to Contribute to Global Citizenship and Build Inclusive and Peaceful Societies event, hosted by the Committee of Human Fraternity and the Muslim Council of Elders in Abu Dhabi on 23-25 April 2024.

Referencing the *Document on Human Fraternity*, an interfaith declaration co-written and signed by Pope Francis and the Grand Imam of Al-Azhar, Ahmad El-Tayeb, in Abu Dhabi in 2019, Monsignor Martinelli insists there needs to be a "growing in the awareness of peoples and religions [and] the deepest respect for diversity", so that there is a "shared journey in which believers of different faiths learn to know and respect each other, promoting together ethical and spiritual values for the good of humanity".

"If every authentic educational experience is, as the Abu Dhabi declaration reads, an act of hope and a path to the future, interfaith education communicates an even greater hope for all humanity: the possibility of creating a more fraternal and humane society, where there is tolerance, coexistence, solidarity and social friendship," said Monsignor Martinelli.

Interreligious education implies, first, the recognition that every human being is a religious being, created to be in relationship with God and with others in the search for the common good, Monsignor Martinelli continued.

An authentic educational experience, he added, "must form the religious feeling, that is, the constitutive reference to the transcendent, omnipotent, merciful and creative God, who wants all the faithful to treat each other as brothers".

The religious dimension is absolutely constitutive of the educational experience. In fact, religion goes to the heart of the anthropological experience as it concerns the relationship of each person with God, in order to collaborate with all people of goodwill for a society more human and more fraternal," he said.

In this sense, the prelate added, the public schools that the Apostolic Vicariate directs in the United Arab Emirates want to become a humble contribution to this interreligious education that forms new generations, collaboration and solidarity among all.

"Religions have the common task of reminding humanity of the need to deal with the religious and ethical dimensions of life. Without God," in fact, "the human being becomes inhuman."

Convening of Champions is a meeting held as part of the Ethics Education Fellowship Programme. The meeting was composed of a two-day technical discussion, sharing and development of collaborative plans, followed by a one-day high-level segment and was co-hosted by the Muslim Council of Elders, the Higher Committee of Human Fraternity, UNESCO, Arigatou International, KAICIID International Dialogue Centre and the Guerrand-Hermès Foundation for Peace.

Condensed and adapted from bit.ly/3QLX3TZ.

Coming Events

June 2024

05 World Environment Day, worldenvironmentday.global

07 Feast of the Sacred Heart of Jesus (Catholic Christian) AND
Dhul Hijjah – first day of the month in which *Hajj* takes place (tbc) (Islam)

08 The Immaculate Heart of Mary (Catholic Christian)

10 King's Birthday Public Holiday (NSW)

17 *Eid al-Adha* (Feast of Sacrifice) (tbc) (Islam)

18 International Day for Countering Hate Speech, un.org/en/observances/countering-hate-speech

20 UN World Refugee Day, unhcr.org/en-au/world-refugee-day

24 Birth of John the Baptist (Catholic Christian)

25 *Youm Ghadeer* – The Day of Ghadeer (Shi'ite Islam)

July 2024

06 *Al-Hijra* (The Migration) 1st of *Muharram* – first day of the Islamic New Year (Islam)

07-14 National NAIDOC Week, naidoc.org.au

16 *Ashura* (The 10th Day of *Muharram* – Martydom of Imam Hussain) (Shi'ite Islam) (tbc)

30 UN National Day of Friendship, un.org/en/observances/friendship-day

August 2024

06 Feast of the Transfiguration of the Lord (Catholic Christian and Orthodox Christian)
AND Hiroshima Day

08 Feast of St Mary of the Cross MacKillop (Catholic Christian)

15 The Dormition/Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary (Catholic Christian and Orthodox Christian)

September 2024

01 World Day of Prayer for the Care of Creation (Catholic Christian)

15 *Mawlid al-Nabi* – The birth of the Prophet Muhhamad (Islam)

21 UN International Day of Peace, un.org/en/observances/international-day-peace

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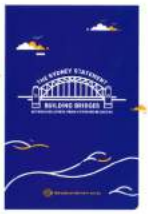

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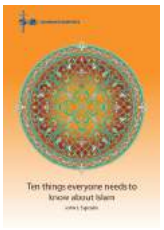

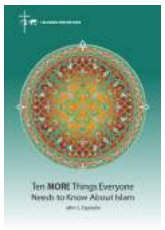

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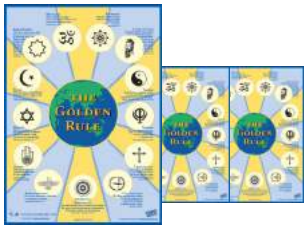

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June 2024