



PONTIFICIUM CONSILIUM
PRO
DIALOGO INTER RELIGIONES

N. 1172/15/B/E-MAIL

The Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue presents its compliments to the Embassy of the State of Palestine to the Holy See and would be grateful for forwarding the attached letter from Cardinal Tauran President of the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue to H.E. Mr Mahmoud Abbas, President of the State of Palestine.

The Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue avails itself of this opportunity to renew to the Embassy of Palestine to the Holy See the expression of its high consideration.

Rome, 18 December 2015



Embassy of the State of Palestine
to the Holy See
E-mail: issa.kassissieh@nad-nsu.ps



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From the Vatican, 18 December 2015

N. 1172/15

Your Excellency,

First and foremost, I would like to assure you of my shared concern and continued prayer, as well as that of my collaborators at the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue, for a fruitful dialogue, real reconciliation and a just and permanent peace between Palestinians and Israelis.

I am grateful to your Excellency for the readiness expressed and the efforts made towards the resumption of dialogue between Al-Azhar and the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue (PCID).

During his recent visit to the PCID, the Ambassador of the State of Palestine to the Holy See, H.E. Mr. Issa Kassissiheh, informed us about your visit to the Grand Imam of Al-Azhar, His Eminence Sheikh Ahmad Al-Tayyib and his readiness to meet with His Holiness Pope Francis, making a visit to Rome, accompanied possibly by His Holiness Pope Tawadros II, Coptic-Orthodox Patriarch of Alexandria.

I am pleased about the positive attitude of Dr Al-Tayyib and am grateful to Your Excellency for facilitating it. It is also my joy to inform you that Pope Francis has expressed his readiness to receive the Grand Imam Al-Tayyib.

In order to help in your mediation, to secure the good will of the Grand Imam and to secure the success of the important endeavours, I deem it opportune to offer some information and clarifications.

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His Excellency
Mr. Mahmoud Abbas
President of the State of Palestine
Ramallah

The institutional collaboration between the PCID and Al-Azhar was established in 1998, through an Agreement signed by the President of the PCID and the Wakil of Al-Azhar, a copy of which I am sending here in attachment. Among the points agreed upon was holding of annual meeting, altering between Rome and Cairo, for which each part was free to appoint its representatives. After the historical visit of Pope John Paul II to Al-Azhar on February 24, 2000, our Azhari partners asked and obtained the date of the annual meeting of the Committee on that very historic day itself.

The now famous and misunderstood lecture of Pope emeritus Benedict XVI in Regensburg did disturb the relations between the Al-Azhar and the PCID, without however causing their interruption. In fact, the annual meeting that year was held in Cairo at Al-Azhar on 24 and 25 February 2008. The then Grand Imam Dr Muhammad Sayyid Tantawi, making an exception, participated partially in that meeting. Unfortunately he died in Saudi Arabia a few weeks later.

After the attack against the Coptic-Orthodox Church in Alexandria in which twenty one faithful were killed and eight wounded, Pope Benedict XVI appealed for the protection of Christians in the Middle East. Besides a strong reaction by the Government, Dr Al-Tayyib decided to annul the annual meeting that was scheduled to take place in Rome on 23 and 24 February 2011.

All the efforts by the PCID to discuss the situation and to re-start the dialogue were unfortunately unsuccessful.

I am now pleased, as I stated before, about the possibility of reconciliation and resumption of dialogue and collaboration, for the good of Muslims and Christians at a time when there is much tension and violence committed in the name of religion.

I would like to make the following proposals:

A meeting of small working committee composed of three experts from each side. It would be opportune that they meet in Rome, where the last meeting should have taken place and especially where the meeting between Pope Francis and the Grand Imam Al-Tayyib will hopefully take place. However, if Al-Azhar prefers to hold such a meeting in Cairo, the PCID will accept it.

A meeting – of one or two days – can have on its agenda, an exchange of views on the present situation of the relations between Muslims and Christians, the so-called phenomena of Islamophobia and of Christianophobia, the revision of the Agreement of 1998, the preparation for the visit of the Grand Imam to the Vatican and the draft of a common statement informing of the resumption of dialogue between Al-Azhar and the PCID.

About the timing for a the meeting of experts, it can be fixed through the Embassy of Egypt to the Holy see, on a date acceptable to both the institutions.

As regard the visit of the Grand Imam to the Vatican and his meeting with Pope Francis, this encounter should be the consecration of the above-mentioned initiatives, and it would be opportune to hold it, if this is acceptable to Al-Azhar, on a date closest to 24 February, for the above-mentioned reasons.

Awaiting your kind reply and renewing the expression of my gratitude and esteem to Your Excellency, I am,

Faithfully yours

Jean Louis Cardinal Tauran

Cardinal Jean-Louis Tauran
President