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**Audience with the Grand Imam of Al-Azhar: common commitment by religious authorities and faithful for world peace and the rejection of violence and terrorism**

Vatican City, 23 May 2016 – At noon today, in the Apostolic Palace, the Holy Father Francis received in audience the Grand Imam of Al-Azhar, Ahmad Muhammad Al-Tayyib.

The Grand Imam was accompanied by a large delegation including: Professor Abbas Shouman, under-secretary of Al-Azhar; Professor Mahmaoud Hamdi Zakzouk, member of the Council of Senior Scholars of the Al-Azhar University and director of the Al-Azhar Centre for Dialogue; Judge Mohamed Mahmoud Abdel Salam, advisor to the Grand Imam; Professor Mohie Afifi Afifi Ahmed, general secretary of the Academy for Islamic Research; the ambassador Mahmoud Abdel Gawad, diplomatic advisor to the Grand Imam; Tamer Tawfik, advisor; and Ahmad Alshourbagy, second secretary. The delegation was accompanied by the ambassador of the Arab Republic of Egypt at the Holy See, Hatem Seif Elnasr.

The Grand Imam was welcomed and accompanied to meet the Holy Father by the president of the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue, Cardinal Jean-Louis Tauran, and Bishop Miguel Angel Ayuso Guixot, secretary of the same dicastery.

The discussions, which took place in a very cordial atmosphere, lasted for around thirty minutes. The two authoritative interlocutors highlighted the great significance of this new meeting in the framework of dialogue between the Catholic Church and Islam. They went on to focus on the common commitment of the authorities and faithful of the great religions to peace in the world, the rejection of violence and terrorism, the situation of Christians in the context of conflict and tension in the Middle East, and their protection.

The Pope gave the Grand Imam a Medallion of the olive tree of peace, and a copy of his Encyclical Letter *Laudato Si'*.

Following the audience with the Holy Father, before leaving the Apostolic Palace, in another room in the Apartment of Audiences, the Grand Imam and his delegation met with Cardinal Tauran, president of the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue, accompanied by Bishop Ayuso Guixot, secretary of the same dicastery, and their delegation.

The Grand Imam left the Apostolic Palace shortly after 1 p.m.

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