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BUREAU DE PRESSE DU SAINT-SIEGE
PRESSEAMT DES HEILIGEN STUHLs

BOLLETTINO

SALA STAMPA DELLA SANTA SEDE

N. 0139

Giovedì 26.02.2009

FINAL DECLARATION OF THE ANNUAL MEETING OF THE JOINT COMMITTEE FOR DIALOGUE OF THE PONTIFICAL COUNCIL FOR INTERRELIGIOUS DIALOGUE (VATICAN) AND THE PERMANENT COMMITTEE OF AL-AZHAR FOR DIALOGUE AMONG THE MONOTHEISTIC RELIGIONS (CAIRO, EGYPT) - ROME, 24-25 FEBRUARY 2009

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The Joint Committee for Dialogue, established in 1998, held its annual meeting in Rome on Tuesday 24 and Wednesday 25 February 2009; it was jointly presided over by His Eminence Cardinal Jean-Louis Tauran, President of the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue, and by Prof. Cheikh Ali Abd al-Baqi Shahata, Secretary General of the Academy for Islamic Research of al-Azhar, Cairo, Egypt.

The Catholic delegation was composed of the following:

- Archbishop Pier Luigi Celata

Secretary of the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue

- Monsignor Khaled Akasheh

Head Officer for Islam, Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue

- Dr. Bernard Sabella

Associate Professor Emeritus of Sociology, Bethlehem University.

The al-Azhar delegation was composed of:

- Prof. Cheikh Ala' al-Din Muhammad Isma'il al-Ghabashi Imam of the Grand Mosque of Rome

- Prof. Cheikh Hamdi Muhammad Dasouqi al-Atrash Imam of the Mosque of Ostia (Italy).

The participants listened to the presentation of the theme *The Promotion of a Pedagogy and Culture of Peace with Particular Reference to the Role of Religions* from the point of view of Catholics, by Dr Bernard Sabella, and from the Islamic point of view by Cheikh Ali Shahata.

The discussions took place in a spirit of mutual respect, openness, and friendship. They were inspired by the conviction of the importance of good relations between Christians and Muslims and of their specific contribution to peace in the world.

The participants agreed on the following:

1. Peace and security are much needed in our present world marked by many conflicts and a feeling of insecurity.
2. Both Christians and Muslims consider peace a gift from God and, at the same time, the fruit of human endeavor. No true and lasting peace can be achieved without justice and equality among persons and communities.
3. Religious leaders, especially Muslims and Christians, have the duty to promote a culture of peace, each within his respective community, especially through teaching and preaching.
4. A culture of peace should permeate all aspects of life: religious formation, education, interpersonal relations and the arts in their diverse forms. To this end, scholastic books should be revised in order not to contain material which may offend the religious sentiments of other believers, at times through the erroneous presentation of dogmas, morals or history of other religions.
5. The media have a major role and responsibility in the promotion of positive and respectful relations among the faithful of various religions.
6. Recognizing the strong link between peace and human rights, special attention was given to the defense of the dignity of the human person and his/her rights, especially regarding freedom of conscience and of religion.
7. Youth, the future of all religions and of humanity itself, need special care in order to be protected from fanaticism and violence, and to become peace builders for a better world.
8. Mindful of the suffering endured by the peoples of the Middle East due to non-resolved conflicts, the participants, in respect of the competence of the political leaders, ask to make use, through dialogue, of the resources of international law to solve the problems at stake in truth and justice.

Grateful to Almighty God for the abundant fruits of this meeting, the participants agreed to have the next meeting of the Committee in Cairo, from Tuesday, the 23rd to Wednesday, the 24th February 2010.

Cheikh Ali Abd al-Baqi Shahata

Cardinal Jean-Louis Tauran

Head of al-Azhar Delegation

Head of the Catholic Delegation

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