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OFICINA DE PRENSA DE LA SANTA SEDE SALA DE IMPRENSA DA SANTA SÉ
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N. 0291

Giovedì 11.04.2024

Comunicato del Dicastero per il Dialogo Interreligioso

At the initiative of the Dicastery for Interreligious Dialogue, we, the coordinators of the Bishops' Commissions for Interreligious Dialogue, along with pastoral workers involved in this field across the African continent, gathered for a Consultative Workshop in Nairobi, Kenya, from 9-10 April 2024, to discuss the theme: "*Christianity in Dialogue with Islam and African Traditional Religion (ATR): Challenges and Opportunities.*"

We gathered to support one another in our role of coordinating the Bishops' Commissions for Interreligious Dialogue and to send a message to the people of Africa that religions can play a greater role in building a culture of peace, reconciliation, and fraternity. We believe that we can do this through education and engagement in interreligious dialogue.

In the course of our discussions, we explored ways and means to implement the words of Pope Francis: "At a time when various forms of fundamentalist intolerance are damaging relationships between individuals, groups and peoples, let us be committed to living and teaching the value of respect for others, a love capable of welcoming differences, and the priority of the dignity of every human being over his or her ideas, opinions, practices and even sins" (*Fratelli Tutti*, 191; cf. *Africae Munus*, 94).

We recognize 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 recognize 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 polarization, tensions, conflicts and religious radicalization 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 instrumentalize

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 28:1-20*) 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*, 2). 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 evangelizing 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 evangelization 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 si’*, 3, 62).

We declare that the African continent can only achieve an integral and sustainable development if it can foster a culture of peace and fraternity founded on the principles of freedom, justice, democracy, respect, and solidarity. A culture that, through dialogue, diplomacy, and negotiation, respects human rights and dignity and rejects violence. In this regard, religious leaders have a great responsibility to foster harmony and educate their respective followers to live as brothers and sisters. To this end, the creation of an Episcopal Commission for Interreligious Dialogue should be encouraged in each African country in order to promote various expressions of interreligious dialogue.

We, therefore, commit ourselves: First, to continue discussing the characteristics of the African cultural environment and African identity that enable constructive interreligious dialogue guided by the light of the Gospel and the Church’s magisterial teachings. Second, to emphasize the importance of interreligious dialogue in a pluralistic environment by promoting education that is open to synergies and to the new challenges of our time and that rejects the isolationist attitudes that generate intrareligious and interreligious tensions and conflicts. Third, to involve political decision-makers, religious leaders, NGOs, women, and young people in innovative interfaith strategies that promote dialogue at local, national, and continental levels. Fourth, to explore various opportunities that can enhance diverse forms of interreligious dialogue.

We express our gratitude to the Holy See’s Dicastery for Interreligious Dialogue for organizing this important event. We also thank the Apostolic Nunciature in Kenya and the Commission for Interreligious Dialogue and Ecumenism of the Kenya Conference of Catholic Bishops for their cooperation.

Donum Dei-Roussel House, Nairobi, KENYA
10 April 2024

[00623-EN.01] [Original text: English]

[B0291-XX.01]

