

# MUSLIMS, CATHOLICS DISCREDIT RELIGION-INSPIRED VIOLENCE

## Vatican and Sunni Voices Join in Historic Declaration

By Jesús Colina

CAIRO, Egypt, MARCH 1, 2010 ([Zenit.org](http://www.zenit.org)).- Muslim and Catholic representatives have joined their voices in rejecting the manipulation of religion to justify political interests, violence or discrimination.

A historic declaration signed by the president of the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue and a Sunni leader from the Al-Azhar university marked the conclusion of an annual meeting held last week in Cairo. The meetings gather members of the pontifical council and the Al-Azhar permanent committee for dialogue among the monotheistic religions.

Sheik Muhammad Abd al-Aziz Wasil and Cardinal Jean-Louis Tauran were the co-signers.

The final declaration explains that the participants were received by the grand imam of Al-Azhar, professor and sheik Muhammad Sayyed Tantawi. Cardinal Tauran thanked him for having condemned the acts of violence in which six Christians and a Muslim policeman died in Naga Hamadi, Egypt, on the past Orthodox Christmas, and for having expressed solidarity to the victims' families and reaffirmed the equality of rights and duties of all citizens, regardless of their religious membership.

Sheik Tantawi said he only did what he thought was his duty in face of those tragic events.

## Manipulation

With the help of documents presented by Monsignor Bernard Munono Muyembe and by professor Abdallah Mabrouk al-Naggar, the committee analyzed the topic "The Phenomenon of Confessional Violence: To Understand the Phenomenon and Its Causes and Propose Solutions, Making Particular Reference to the Role of Religions in This Connection."

At the end of the meeting, the participants agreed to make these recommendations: "to pay greater attention to the manipulation of religion with political objectives or of another character that can be a source of violence; to avoid discrimination in virtue of religious identity; to open the heart to mutual forgiveness and reconciliation, necessary conditions for a peaceful and fruitful coexistence."

Muslims and Catholics urged the public "to recognize similarities and respect differences as requisite of a culture of dialogue, based on common values; to affirm that both sides commit themselves again in the recognition and respect of the dignity of every human being, without distinction of ethnic or religious membership; to oppose religious discrimination in all fields -- just laws should guarantee a fundamental equality; to promote ideals of justice, solidarity and cooperation to guarantee a peaceful and prosperous life for all."

The bilateral meeting ended with the commitment to "oppose with determination any act that tends to create tensions, divisions and conflicts in societies; to promote a culture of mutual respect and dialogue through education in the family, in schools, in churches and in mosques, spreading a spirit of fraternity between all persons and the community; to oppose attacks against religions by means of social communication."

Finally Catholics and Muslims called for "ensuring that the preaching of religious leaders, as well as school teaching and textbooks, not emit statements or make references to historical events that, directly or indirectly, can arouse a violent attitude among followers of the different religions."

## Nuanced

Archbishop Michael Fitzgerald, papal nuncio in Egypt and the Holy See's representative to the Cairo-based Arab League, spoke with Vatican Radio last week about that final point.

He said that textbooks have inaccuracies "and things that don't help appreciate the other religion or the other person." This problem applies not only to the history of religion, but to the teaching of history itself, he suggested.

"There is work to be done in fact to give a more nuanced view of certain periods of history, whether it is the Islamic invasions of other countries or whether it is the Crusades," Archbishop Fitzgerald proposed.

The committee scheduled its next meeting in Rome on Feb. 23-24, 2011.