

# Egypt Looking to Smooth Ties With Vatican

## Foreign Minister Visits Pontifical Council

VATICAN CITY, MAY 23, 2011 ([Zenit.org](http://www.zenit.org)).- Egypt's minister of foreign affairs visited the Vatican last Wednesday, saying the trip was to smooth over tensions and improve relations.

The Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue released a brief statement Saturday about the meeting.

The communiqué noted that the president and secretary of the council, Cardinal Jean-Louis Tauran and Archbishop Pier Luigi Celata, visited with Nabil Al-Arabi. The cardinal "reiterated the esteem of His Holiness Pope Benedict XVI for the people and authorities of Egypt, and the Holy See's readiness to continue on the path of interreligious dialogue and cooperation with Al-Azhar, carried on regularly since 1998."

Al-Arabi's visit comes some months after the highest authority of Sunni Islam, Ahmad at-Tayyeb, and the Cairo-based Research Council of the University of Al-Azhar froze dialogue with the Vatican.

The Jan. 20 announcement of a dialogue-freeze came in protest of Benedict XVI's statements on religious freedom following a Jan. 1 attack on a Coptic church in Alexandria. The Pope mentioned the issue in passing in a greeting to Italian Parliamentarians in his Jan. 9 Angelus address, and again in his Jan. 10 [speech](#) to the Diplomatic Corps. The World Day of Peace [message](#), from before the Alexandria attack, also takes up the theme of religious freedom.

The great imam of Al-Azhar alleged that the papal comments were an intervention in Egypt's internal affairs.

In addition to the Al-Azhar decision, Egypt also requested that its ambassador to the Holy See "return to Cairo for consultations with the Egyptian foreign ministry," the Vatican reported at the time.

This occurred before the February resignation of President Hosni Sayyid Mubarak.

At Wednesday's meeting, according to the Vatican statement, the foreign minister "conveyed the greetings of Sheikh Al-Azhar, Professor Ahmad at-Tayyeb, and expressed the desire of the Grand Imam that the recent difficulties in the relationship with the Holy See would be overcome."

A note from the Egypt State Information Service reported the foreign minister's "30-minute session of talks with Vatican Foreign Minister [Archbishop] Dominique Mamberti."

It added, "El-Arabi said his current visit to the Vatican aims to clear the air between Egypt and the Holy See and put to rest ill feelings that have been marring relations for quite sometime."

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