



Pope Meets Former Israeli President Shimon Peres, Jordanian Royal

Father Lombardi Also Briefs Journalists on Council for the Economy Meeting, Upcoming Q&A With Pope and Children

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The Pope has encouraged Holy Land leaders to continue working for peace and will participate in a charity-sponsored event in which he will interact, via technology, with children from five continents.

In a wide-ranging, impromptu briefing in the Vatican press office this afternoon, Holy See spokesman Father Federico Lombardi spoke on the Pope's meetings this morning with former Israeli President Shimon Peres, and Prince El Hassan bin Talal of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan.

He also briefed reporters on today's meeting of the Council for the Economy taking place at the Vatican, and the Pope's upcoming meeting with the educational charity Scholas Occurrentes which will involve a Q&A with children from five continents.

Shimon Peres' Visit

Pope Francis received Israel's former President Shimon Peres at the Vatican today. The 45 minute meeting comes almost three months since Peres took part in the Pope's Invocation for Peace in the Holy Land, along with Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas and the Patriarch of Constantinople, Bartholomew I. It also take place in the wake of a seven week conflict between Israel and Hamas that claimed over 2,000 lives, mostly Palestinian civilians.

Peres, who has visited Pope Francis several times during this pontificate, stepped down as Israeli President on July 24.

"Peace and the role of religions were the central theme" of the meeting, according to a Vatican statement. Peres presented a plan to create a sort of "United Nations for religions." The idea is based on the assumption that while in the past the majority of wars were motivated by the idea of nationhood, in the current world the trigger for conflicts is "primarily the excuse of religion."

"The Holy Father listened attentively and with interest to the Israeli ex-president's proposal, and the discussion took place in a very cordial atmosphere," the Vatican said.

Father Lombardi said the Holy Father spent a generous amount of time with Peres, which can be seen as a sign of the Holy Father's "esteem" for him.

Facilitated by a translator present, politics did not enter the discussions but rather Peres' various initiatives and projects to advance peace.

Although Pope Francis didn't commit himself to any given peace initiative discussed, he did encourage Peres to continue his efforts towards peace and gave him and his works great attention, Father Lombardi said.

Jordan's Prince

Peace and religion were also "key points" in the Holy Father's meeting with Prince El Hassan Bin Talal. The prince, founder of the "Royal Institute for Interfaith Studies", presented the centre's activity to the Pope, emphasising the common ground shared by religions and the possibilities of collaboration in activities of solidarity with the least fortunate in a globalised world. "The meeting, again of a cordial nature, lasted around half an hour," the Vatican said.

Although shorter, Father Lombardi stressed that the Pope still spent ample time with the Jordanian royal, at least a half hour.

Council for the Economy

Turning to the Council of the Economy's meeting, Father Lombardi said it began around 9 a.m. this morning and will continue, after lunch, into the afternoon.

The Vatican body, instituted by the Holy Father on 24 February by the Motu proprio "Fidelis dispensator et prudens", is set to discuss the statutes of the institution. Members of the Council will also examine "the transfer of competences from APSA (Administration of the Patrimony of the Apostolic See) to the Secretariat for the Economy and the criteria for drawing up a budget balances system," the Vatican said.

"The primary objective is to basically go ahead with preparations and developing the Secretariat of the Economy," and included go over its statutes, procedures, and continued efforts in favor of providing "clarity" and "transparency," Father Lombardi said.

Absent from the meeting were both Cardinal Juan Luis Cipriani and Jean-Baptiste de Franssu, the new head of the 'Vatican bank', officially known as the Institute for Works of Religion (IOR).

Father Lombardi explained that the cardinal had a conflicting appointment and that Franssu "no longer can participate after having been nominated as president of the IOR." He said a replacement for Franssu will "certainly" be found.

The current meeting will also include preparation of the 2015 budget, something Cardinal George Pell, prefect of the Secretariat for the Economy, had mentioned in July.

Council members are also specifying how to perform the rendering of accounts, budgets and criteria for the coming years, Father Lombardi said.

The relationship between the Council and the Secretariat for the Economy, he added, is defined by its statutes: the Council is understood to be a body having the authority to act, is not a mere advisory body of the Secretariat of Economy and is intended to help consolidate the existing management structures of the Holy See.

To date, its members have comprised eight religious and seven laypeople: Reinhard Card. Marx, Archbishop of München und Freising (Coordinator); Juan Luis Card. Cipriani Thorne, Archbishop of Lima; Daniel N. Card. DiNardo, Archbishop of Galveston-Houston; Wilfrid Fox Card. Napier, Archbishop of Durban; Jean-Pierre Card. Ricard, Archbishop Bordeaux; Norberto Card. Rivera Carrera, Archbishop of México; John Card. Tong Hon, Bishop of Hong Kong; Agostino Card. Vallini, Vicar General of His Holiness for the Diocese of Rome.

Its lay members have been: Joseph F.X. Zahra, Malta (Vice-Coordinator); Jean-Baptiste de Franssu, France; John Kyle, Canada; Enrique Llano Cueto, Spain; Jochen Messemer, Germany; Francesco Vermiglio, Italy; George Yeo, Singapore.

'Scholas' Encounter

On a different note, Father Lombardi mentioned that 'Scholas Occurrentes' is holding the last of its four-day conference at the Vatican today. They will also have an audience with the Holy Father in the

Vatican's Paul VI Hall. Not only is the Pope expected to greet those present, but also participate in an interactive digital exchange with students.

The Vatican spokesman underscored how this initiative is not just about promoting Catholic schools, but schools in general, and is aimed at advancing interreligious and intercultural relationships for all schools worldwide.

Father Lombardi said the Pope will have a question and answer with students – over a digital platform — from five different continents: Salvador for the Americas, Turkey for Europe, Israel, Australia, and South Africa.

“The event will not be available live,” Fr. Lombardi said, noting it has been challenging to integrate the very distinct technological resources, but there will be images.

“Scholas” is a worldwide network of schools and educational centers promoted by Pope Francis. It came to be after when, as Archbishop of Buenos Aires, Jorge Mario Bergoglio, pushed to combine two educational programs. The charity also organized the Interreligious Match for Peace at Rome’s Olympic Stadium last Monday.

SSPX

Also, addressing speculation in the media, Fr. Lombardi did confirm there will be a meeting in the "near future" between the prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, German Cardinal Gerhard Ludwig Muller and the head of the Society of St. Pius X, Bishop Bernard Fellay.

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