

100 Rabbis Prepare to Welcome Pontiff to Holy Land

Affirm Unity in Commitment to Interreligious Dialogue

JERUSALEM, APRIL 30, 2009 (Zenit.org).- More than a hundred rabbis of various denominations will sign a message welcoming Benedict XVI to the Holy Land and encouraging dialogue between Jews and Christians.

The presidents of the International Foundation for Interreligious and Intercultural Education, Adalberto and Armando Bernardini, told ZENIT that the message is due to be published on the Web site of an Israeli newspaper, "Ha'Arezt."

The initiative is being promoted by one of the foundation's members, Rabbi Jack Bemporard, also director of the New Jersey based Center for Interreligious Understanding.

From May 8 to 15 the Pope will visit the Holy Land, Jordan, Israel and the Palestinian territories, in a visit described by the government of Israel as a "bridge for peace."

The Rabbi message, titled "United in Our Age," is inspired by "Nostra Aetate," the statement that the Second Vatican Council issued on October 28, 1965, which motivated closer relations between Jews and Catholics.

In particular, the message cites the document that states: "Since the spiritual patrimony common to Christians and Jews is thus so great, this sacred synod wants to foster and recommend that mutual understanding and respect which is the fruit, above all, of biblical and theological studies as well as of fraternal dialogues."

Addressing the Pontiff, the message affirms: "In this spirit, we -- rabbis and Jewish leaders -- warmly welcome you and your mission of peace to Israel.

"With one voice, we are united in our commitment to interreligious dialogue, to opening more paths to increased understanding, and to continually recognize and strengthen the important relationship between Catholics and Jews worldwide."

"And where better to reaffirm that relationship," it adds, "than in the Holy Land of Israel, a place both religions treasure as part of a shared heritage."

The message concludes: "B'shalom."