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BUREAU DE PRESSE DU SAINT-SIEGE
PRESSEAMT DES HEILIGEN STUHLS

BOLLETTINO

SALA STAMPA DELLA SANTA SEDE

N. 171206a

Wednesday 06.12.2017

Audience with participants in the meeting of the Permanent Committee for Dialogue with Religious figures in Palestine

At 9.00 today, in the Study of the Paul VI Hall, the Holy Father received in audience the participants in the meeting of the Permanent Committee for Dialogue with Religious figures in Palestine, promoted by the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue. The Palestinian delegation was composed of H.E. Mr. Mahmoud Al-Habbash, H.E. Mr. Ziad Al-Bandak, H.E. Mr. Adman Al-Husseini, H.E. Mr. Isaa Kassinie, and Mr. Ammar Al-Nisous. As well as the members of the Palestinian delegation, the meeting was attended by Dr. May Al-Kaila, ambassador of the State of Palestine to Italy. For the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue, His Eminence Cardinal Jean-Louis Tauran, H.E. Msgr. Miguel Ayuso, and Msgr. Khaled Akasheh were present.

The following is the text of the Holy Father's address to those present at the meeting:

Address of the Holy Father

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am happy to receive your Delegation, hosted by the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue. You have come to the Vatican to explore ways for creating a permanent Working Group for dialogue between the Council and the Palestinian Commission for Interreligious Dialogue.

For the Catholic Church, it is always a joy to build bridges of dialogue with communities, individuals and organizations. It is certainly a particular joy to do so with Palestinian religious and intellectual leaders.

The Holy Land is for us Christians the land par excellence of dialogue between God and mankind. The culmination of that dialogue took place in Nazareth between the Angel Gabriel and the Virgin Mary, an event to which the Koran also makes reference.

That dialogue continues in a unique way between Jesus and His people, in representation of humanity as a whole. Indeed, Jesus is the Word of God and His speaking to men and women is, in the words of one Muslim exponent, "the dialogue of God with humanity".

Dialogue takes place at every level: with ourselves through reflection and prayer, in our families, in our religious communities, between different religious communities, and also in civil society. The primary condition of that dialogue is reciprocal respect and a commitment to strengthening that respect, for the sake of recognizing the rights of all people, wherever they happen to be. Dialogue is the source of greater mutual knowledge, greater mutual esteem and cooperation in the pursuit of the common good, and generous cooperation in ensuring that those in need receive all necessary assistance.

It is my hope that your consultations may help to open a space of sincere dialogue for the benefit of all the members of Palestinian society, and the Christian community in particular, given its small numbers and the challenges it faces, especially with regard to emigration.

I am conscious of the kindness that the Authorities of the State of Palestine, particularly President Mahmoud Abbas, have shown to the Christian community, acknowledging its place and its role in Palestinian society.

Upon all of you I invoke abundant blessings, and I offer my prayerful good wishes of peace and prosperity for the Palestinian people, for the Holy Land, and for the entire Middle East, which is so dear to me and to the Catholic Church.
