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Archbishop Edgar Peña Parra, substitute secretary for general affairs in the Vatican Secretaria

Archbishop Edgar Peña Parra, substitute secretary for general affairs in the Vatican Secretariat of State, participates in the inauguration of the new apostolic nunciature in Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates, Feb. 4, 2022. (CNS photo/Vatican Media)

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VATICAN CITY — The opening of a new apostolic nunciature in the United Arab Emirates is a testament to fraternity and goodwill between Muslims and Christians, said Archbishop Edgar Peña Parra.

Speaking at the inaugural ceremony in Abu Dhabi Feb. 4, Archbishop Peña, the substitute secretary for general affairs in the Vatican Secretariat of State, said the new nunciature is also "a further sign of the Holy Father's solicitude and concern for all the people in this land."

"May this new embassy of the Holy See serve as a place of encounter and dialogue for our bilateral cooperation for many years to come," the archbishop said.

Among those present at the inauguration were Sheikh Mohammed bin Zayed Al Nahyan, the crown prince and minister of foreign affairs and international cooperation; Bishop Paul Hinder, apostolic vicar for Southern Arabia; and Msgr. Yoannis Gaid, member of the Higher Committee of Human Fraternity.

The Holy See and the United Arab Emirates established diplomatic relations in 2007, but the nuncio resided in Kuwait. Currently the nunciature is headed by Slovenian Msgr. Kryspin Dubiel, who serves as chargé d'affaires.

The opening of the nunciature coincided with the third anniversary of the day that Pope Francis and Sheikh Ahmad el-Tayeb, grand imam of al-Azhar in Egypt, signed a document on promoting dialogue and "human fraternity" during the pope's 2019 apostolic visit to the United Arab Emirates.

The document, Archbishop Peña said, showed that unity between Muslims and Christians is possible through the "shared belief in God the creator of all things" from which "stems the call for believers to live in fraternity with all people regardless of race, religion or creed and to safeguard creation, our common home."

"Contrary to any distortion or manipulation of religion, the response to this call can be nothing other than choosing the path of dialogue, which leads to better mutual understanding and cooperation," he said.

Archbishop Peña said he hoped that the joint declaration would "serve as a framework" for closer ties between the Holy See and the United Arab Emirates and help to "build a more just and peaceful world."

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"These efforts are truly needed today as we continue to see the negative consequences of replacing transcendent truths about the human person and creation with purely superficial and materialistic values," the archbishop said.

Earlier in the week, Archbishop Peña marked the opening of the nunciature, as well as the feast of the Presentation of the Lord and the World Day of Prayer for Consecrated Life, by celebrating Mass at St. Joseph's Cathedral in Abu Dhabi.

In his homily Feb. 2, the archbishop conveyed Pope Francis' greetings and spiritual closeness with the local Catholic community and reflected on "the important role played by consecrated life in the mission of the church," especially in the United Arab Emirates.

"This land has been blessed by the service of many men and women religious throughout the years, including Bishop Hinder, who is a member of the Franciscan order," he said.

Archbishop Peña encouraged Catholics in the country to continue to be witnesses of God's saving message that brings "liberty to those in spiritual captivity or blindness" and "offers truth and authentic unity."

"I dare say that the Catholic community of Abu Dhabi and the Arabian Peninsula as a whole is also an example of hope-filled patience and Christian living," he said.