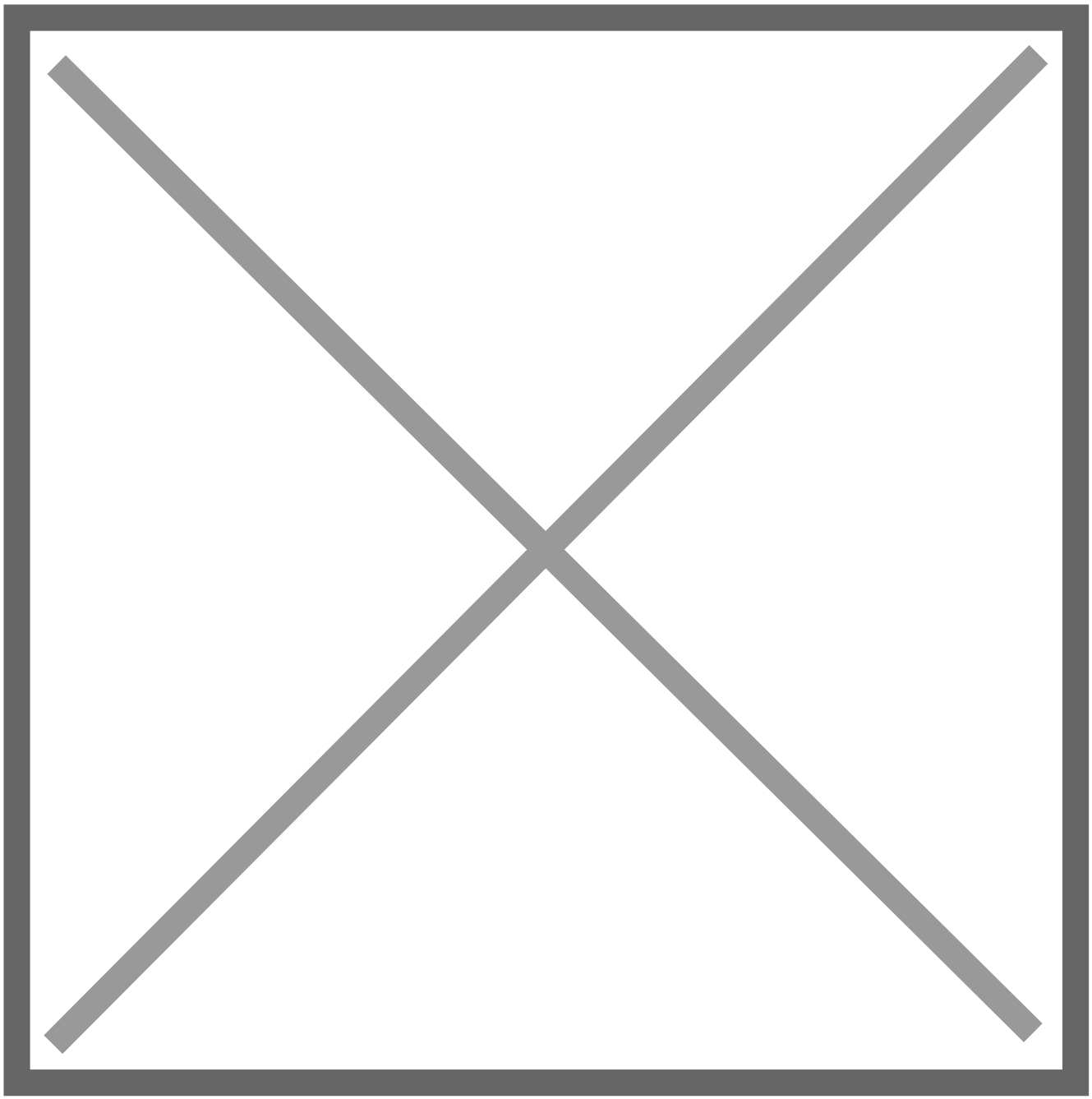
Vatican



Pope Francis exchanges gifts with Salman bin Hamad Al Khalifa, crown prince of Bahrain, during a private audience at the Vatican Feb. 3, 2020. (CNS photo/Paul Haring)



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ROME — Pope Francis will visit the Kingdom of Bahrain from Nov. 3-6 to participate in the "Bahrain Forum for Dialogue: East and West for Human Coexistence," the Vatican confirmed on Sept. 28.

The pontiff was officially invited to visit the Persian Gulf country in Nov. 2021 during a meeting at the Vatican with Sheikh Khalid bin Ahmed bin Mohammed, adviser for diplomatic affairs to Bahrain's King Hamad bin Isa Al-Khalifa.

The visit will mark the 39th international trip of his papacy and follows another journey to a Muslim-majority country, after the pope's visit earlier this month to Kazakhstan to participate in the 7th Congress of Leaders of World and Traditional Religions. During this visit, Francis will visit the Bahraini capital city of Manama, and the city of Awali.

The small Kingdom of Bahrain is home to some 1.8 million people, with an estimated Catholic population of 80,000.

In Dec. 2021, Vatican Cardinal Luis Tagle traveled to the country on behalf of Francis for the consecration of the Cathedral of Our Lady of Arabia, which is now the largest Catholic cathedral in the Persian Gulf.

King Hamad, who attended the ceremony, reportedly told Tagle that he hoped Bahrain, which has a Shiite Muslim majority, would continue to be open to people of all religious traditions.

Hamad has officially endorsed Francis' landmark document on "Human Fraternity for World Peace and Living Together," which is widely considered a major advancement in the Catholic Church's relationship with the Muslim world.

The document was signed together by the pope and Sheikh Ahmed al Tayyeb, the grand imam of Al Azhar, in Abu Dhabi in Feb. 2019, when Francis became the first pontiff in history to set foot on the Arab Peninsula.

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From the outset of his papacy, Francis has prioritized interfaith outreach, though most of his direct encounters and travels within the Muslim world have been with Sunnis, which represent the largest branch of Islamic adherents. His trip to Bahrain is expected to provide him with an opportunity to extend that engagement with the Shia world.

Francis first hinted at a potential visit to Bahrain en route back from Kazakhstan, telling reporters that despite being 85-years-old and dealing with mobility issues due to a knee injury, he intends to keep traveling.

A full schedule of the pope's itinerary has yet to be released.

This story appears in the **Pope Francis in Bahrain** feature series. View the full series.