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Pope Francis at guests from wheelchair

Pope Francis waves after a meeting in the Apostolic Palace at the Vatican April 4, 2024, with participants in a colloquium sponsored by the Dicastery for Interreligious Dialogue and the Kazakhstan-based Congress of Leaders of World and Traditional Religions, the Kazakh Senate and the Nursultan Nazarbayev Center for Interfaith and Intercivilization Dialogue. (CNS/Vatican Media)

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In a world filled with "bellicose rhetoric," religious leaders must make extra efforts to speak of peace and to nurture every action and attitude that lessens tensions and increases dialogue, Pope Francis said.

"While words of hatred multiply, people are dying in brutal conflicts," the pope said April 4.

Francis made the comments to a group comprised mainly of Muslims and Christians participating in a colloquium sponsored by the Dicastery for Interreligious Dialogue and the Kazakhstan-based Congress of Leaders of World and Traditional Religions,

the Kazakh Senate and the Nursultán Nazarbáyev Center for Development of Interfaith and Intercivilization Dialogue.

Religious leaders need "to speak of peace, to dream of peace, to give creativity and substance to hopes for peace, for these are the real hopes of individuals and of peoples," the pope said. "Every effort should be made to do so, in dialogue with everyone."

Francis said he hoped the colloquium, "marked by respect for differences" would be "an example of not seeing the other person as a threat but as a gift and a valued partner for reciprocal growth."

The theme of the meeting in Rome was "Our Common Home: A Divine Gift to be Loved and Cared for," which the pope said was a very important topic for interreligious dialogue.

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"Indeed, respect for creation is an indispensable consequence of love for the Creator, for our brothers and sisters with whom we share life on this planet, and in a particular way for future generations, to whom we are called to hand on a legacy to be cherished, not an ecological debt to be paid," he said.

With government leaders present, including Maulen Ashimbayev, president of the Kazakh Senate, Francis also spoke of how a "healthy secularity" helps a democratic nation to prosper.

That form of secularism, he said, "does not confuse religion and politics, but distinguishes them for the good of both," while also recognizing "the essential role of religions in society in service to the common good."

"Peace and social harmony," he said, are fostered by the "fair and equitable treatment of different ethnic, religious and cultural components with regard to employment, access to public services and participation in the political and social life of the nation, so that no one feels discriminated against or favored because of his or her specific identity."