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Respect for religion vital, pope tells Ahmadinejad

Sarah Delaney Catholic News Service | Nov. 11, 2010

VATICAN CITY (CNS) -- Respect for each person's relationship with God is an essential part of building a just social order and real peace, Pope Benedict XVI said in a letter to Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad.

"It is my profound conviction that respect for the transcendent dimension of the human person is an indispensable condition for the construction of a just social order and a stable peace," the pope wrote to the Iranian leader.

Cardinal Jean-Louis Tauran gave the letter to Ahmadinejad Nov. 9 during a meeting in Tehran. The Vatican released a copy of the letter Nov. 11.

Pope Benedict wrote that a person's relationship with God "is the ultimate foundation" of the dignity and sacred character of every human life.

"When the promotion of the dignity of the human person is the primary inspiration of political and social activity that is committed to search for the common good, solid and enduring foundations are created for building peace and harmony between peoples," the pope said.

Pope Benedict told the Iranian leader that during the special Synod of Bishops for the Middle East in October, church leaders reflected on the situation of the region and "on the great challenges placed before the Christian communities present there."

In some countries, the pope said, Christians face "discrimination and even violence and they lack the freedom to live and publicly profess their faith."

Catholics in Iran and throughout the region, he said, want to work with their fellow citizens to promote the common good and they are committed to being builders of peace and reconciliation.

The pope said he hoped the good relations existing between Iran and the Vatican, as well as between the Catholic communities in Iran and civil authorities, would continue to develop. He asked the Iranian president to launch a bilateral commission that could address "questions of common concern, including that of the juridical status of the Catholic Church in the country."

In October, an Iranian official delivered a letter from Ahmadinejad to Pope Benedict in which the president said he hoped to work closely with the Vatican to help stem religious intolerance, the breakup of families and the increase of secularism and materialism.

On that occasion, the contents of the letter were released by Iranian news agencies.

Cardinal Tauran, two other officials from his office and two representatives of the church in Iran participated Nov. 9-11 in the seventh dialogue symposium sponsored by the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue

and Iran's government-related Center for Interreligious Dialogue of the Islamic Culture and Relations Organization.

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