

Published on *National Catholic Reporter* (<https://www.ncronline.org>)

October 28, 2013 at 12:45pm

Pope receives Aung San Suu Kyi, Burmese opposition leader

by Francis X. Rocca by Catholic News Service

Vatican City — Pope Francis met Monday with Burmese opposition leader and Nobel Peace Prize winner Aung San Suu Kyi for what the Vatican called a "rather significant encounter" between two leaders "fundamentally on the same wavelength" regarding nonviolence, democracy and "peaceful coexistence in today's world."

"The Holy Father told me that emotions such as hatred and fear diminish life and the value of the person," Suu Kyi told reporters after the 20-minute meeting. She said the pope also told her "we need to value love and understanding to improve the lives of people."

The Vatican spokesman, Jesuit Fr. Federico Lombardi, called Suu Kyi "one of the most significant personalities in Asia in the area of peace, democracy and peaceful coexistence" and a "symbol of nonviolent commitment to democracy and peace."

A military junta governing Myanmar, formerly Burma, kept Suu Kyi under house arrest for a total of 15 years between 1989 and 2010. An elected parliamentary government took power in 2011, and the following year, Suu Kyi was elected to parliament, where she is now chairwoman of the Committee for the Rule of Law and Tranquility.

Lombardi said Pope Francis "naturally assured (Suu Kyi) of his prayers for Myanmar and for the Catholic community and the church in her country, and of his appreciation for the lady's commitment to development and democracy in her country, assuring her of the collaboration of the Catholic church in these great causes."

The Vatican does not have diplomatic relations with Myanmar, whose overwhelmingly Buddhist

population of 55 million is only 1 percent Catholic.

According to the 2013 Annual Report of the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom, "sectarian violence and severe abuses of religious freedom and human dignity targeting ethnic minority Christians and Muslims continue to occur with impunity" there.

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