

## 1st anniversary of Document on Human Fraternity



*Pope Francis and Ahmad Al-Tayyeb sign the Document on Human Fraternity in Abu Dhabi on 4 February 2019 (Vatican Media)*

**Pope Francis and the Grand Imam of Al-Azhar signed the Document on Human Fraternity on 4 February 2019.** It highlights the need for a sense of fraternity amongst all men and women of goodwill who are invited to promote justice and peace, guaranteeing human rights and religious freedom.

**Amedeo Lomonaco and Linda Bordoni, *Vatican News*, 3 February 2020**

The “Document on Human Fraternity for World Peace and Living Together”, signed in Abu Dhabi a year ago by Pope Francis and the Grand Imam of Al-Azhar, Ahmad Al-Tayyeb, was **widely hailed as a milestone, not only regarding relations between Christianity and Islam, but as a blue-print indicating the way to a culture of dialogue and collaboration between faiths.**

It is an appeal to put an end to wars and condemns the scourges of terrorism and violence, especially those perpetrated by religious motivations. **“Faith,”** the preface reads, **“leads a believer to see in the other a brother or sister to be supported and loved”.**

*“It is a text that has been given honest and serious thought so as to be a joint declaration of good and heartfelt aspirations. It is a document that invites all persons who have faith in God and faith in human fraternity to unite and work together so that it may serve as a guide for future generations to advance a culture of mutual respect in the awareness of the great divine grace that makes all human beings brothers and sisters. “(Document on Human Fraternity)”.*

### **Promote tolerance and justice**

The document asks everyone to commit themselves **“to work strenuously to spread the culture of tolerance and of living together in peace”, putting an end to wars, environmental decay and moral and cultural decline, and to implement “an equitable distribution of natural resources - which only a rich minority benefit from, to the detriment of the majority of the peoples of the earth”.**

### **Protect family and life**

**The two leaders underscore the need to protect the family that “is the fundamental nucleus of society” and safeguard the gift of life:** “We condemn all those practices that are a threat to life such as genocide, acts of terrorism, forced displacement, human organ

trafficking, abortion and euthanasia. We likewise condemn the policies that promote these practices.”

### **Never kill in God’s name**

Furthermore, they declare “that **religions must never incite war, hateful attitudes, hostility and extremism, nor must they incite violence or the shedding of blood.** These tragic realities are the consequence of a deviation from religious teachings. They result from a political manipulation of religions and from interpretations made by religious groups.” This is why **everyone is asked “to refrain from using the name of God to justify acts of murder, exile, terrorism and oppression.”** The Pope and the Grand Imam remember that **“God, the Almighty, has no need to be defended by anyone and does not want His name to be used to terrorize people”.**

### **Religious freedom**

The Document states that **"Freedom is a right of every person:** each individual enjoys the **freedom of belief, thought, expression and action.** The pluralism and the diversity of religions, colour, sex, race and language are willed by God in His wisdom.” For this reason, “the fact that people are forced to adhere to a certain religion or culture must be rejected, as too the imposition of a cultural way of life that others do not accept.”

### **No to discriminatory use of the term ‘minorities’**

The Document states that "it is crucial to establish in our societies the concept of *full citizenship* and reject the discriminatory use of the term *minorities* which engenders feelings of isolation and inferiority.”

### **Recognize women's rights**

It goes on to state that it is “an essential requirement to recognize the right of women to education and employment, and to recognize their freedom to exercise their own political rights”, in the effort **to “free women from historical and social conditioning that runs contrary to the principles of their faith and dignity.** It is also necessary to protect women from sexual exploitation (...). Accordingly, an end must be brought to all those inhuman and vulgar practices that denigrate the dignity of women. Efforts must be made to modify those laws that prevent women from fully enjoying their rights”.

### **Education in schools and universities**

Another demand contained in the Document is that "this Document become the object of research and reflection in all schools, universities and institutes of formation” and a "sign of the closeness between East and West, between North and South”.

### **Religions are bridges between peoples**

**The Document on Human Fraternity was signed at the conclusion of an Interreligious Meeting at the Founder’s Memorial in Abu Dhabi during Pope Francis’ Apostolic Visit to the United Arab Emirates from 3 to 5 February 2019.** During that meeting, the Pope said: “There is no alternative: **we will either build the future together or there will not be a future.** Religions, in particular, cannot renounce the urgent task of building bridges

between peoples and cultures. The time has come when religions should more actively exert themselves, with courage and audacity, and without pretence, to help the human family deepen the capacity for reconciliation, the vision of hope and the concrete paths of peace.”

The Pope’s Apostolic Journey to the UAE garnered worldwide attention. During the flight back to Rome, in his conversation with journalists on board the papal plane, Pope Francis stressed that the Document was born "from faith in God who is Father of all" and follows "the spirit of the Second Vatican Council". On the following day, during the weekly General Audience on 6 February 2019, **the Pope exhorted everyone to read and to study the Abu Dhabi Document** because, he said, it "**gives much impetus to go forward in the dialogue on human brotherhood**". Many observers have pointed out that it opens new horizons not only for dialogue between Christians and Muslims. The UAE Foreign Minister, Sheikh Abdallah Ben Zayed Al Nahyan, for example, described the Pope's meeting with the Grand Imam of Al-Azhar as **marking a new phase in "relations between religions"**.

### **Establishment of a Higher Committee on Fraternity Document**

In order to promote the ideals of tolerance and cooperation contained in the Document on Human Fraternity, **a Committee was established on 20 August 2019 in Abu Dhabi. Its task is to develop a framework for the realization of the objectives contained in the Document**, to prepare the necessary plans for its practical implementation and to follow its application at regional and international levels, also by organizing meetings with religious leaders, heads of international organizations and others in order to promote concerted action. One month after its establishment, **the “Higher Committee” met for the first time in the Vatican at the Casa Santa Marta**. Pope Francis received its members on 11 September and expressed gratitude and encouragement for their work, urging them to be "artisans of fraternity".

### **World Day proposed by Pope and Grand Imam**

Last December, a meeting between the members of the Higher Committee, led by Cardinal Miguel Ángel Ayuso Guixot, President of the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue, and by Judge Muhammad Abd al-Salam, and the UN Secretary General, António Guterres, took place in New York. They brought him a message from Pope Francis and from the Grand Imam of Al-Azhar **proposing the establishment of a World Day of Human Fraternity on 4 February**. Guterres expressed his appreciation and availability for the initiative.

### **Conference in Abu Dhabi marks Document’s 1<sup>st</sup> anniversary**

In view of the first anniversary of the signing of the Abu Dhabi Document, Cardinal Ayuso Guixot recalled its the importance saying: "**The text of the Declaration is becoming increasingly important even beyond relations between Christians and Muslims**". In preparation for the upcoming event on the "Global Pact for Education", **The Muslim Council of Elders has announced the launch of the ‘Arab Media Convention for Human Fraternity’ which takes place in Abu Dhabi on the 3 and 4 February 2020**, a further step in the path set out by Pope Francis and the Grand Imam of Al-Azhar.