

Celebration in Abu Dhabi of the 1st anniversary of the Document on Human Fraternity

To mark the 1st anniversary of the signing of the historic Document on Human Fraternity, an official celebration took place on Tuesday in Abu Dhabi.



Sr Bernadette Mary Reis, fsp – Abu Dhabi, *Vatican News*, 4 February 2020

A year to the day that Pope Francis and the Grand Imam of Al-Azhar signed the Document on Human Fraternity, religious leaders and many others gathered at the Manarat al Saadiyat in Abu Dhabi on Tuesday to Celebrate Human Fraternity.

Voices of human fraternity

The event began with an introduction by the Secretary of the Higher Committee implementing the document, Judge Mohammed Abdel Salam. The Document on Human Fraternity was signed by two great international icons, the Judge began. Now, other voices need to be added to theirs, other collaborators are needed to make the Document real, he said. Nothing will be achieved unless everyone gets involved to defend the right to life and freedom. It was the Pope and the Grand Imam who chose Abu Dhabi as the site for the signing of the Document. A year later, in the same place, he said, the voices of those who embrace human fraternity will be heard.

Common witness needed from people of faith

Patriarch Bartholomew I, Ecumenical Patriarch of Constantinople and the Eastern Orthodox Church followed Judge Abdel Salam. He began saying it was a great joy for him to participate in the anniversary celebration. In a world of rapid change when new challenges are constantly appearing, the Patriarch said that a new stance is required by the world's religions. Credibility of religious leaders, he continued, is measured by how they promote peace and engage in interreligious dialogue. In addition, solutions must be based on human dignity. Religions can do this, he said, by being in spiritual solidarity and promoting initiatives in the political and social spheres. Members of the faith traditions can step in when those spheres reach an impasse. Peace requires struggle and patience. The world expects a common witness to peace from people of faith. He ended saying that there will be no peace in the world unless there is peace among religions, and that will not happen without interreligious dialogue. Thus, what is necessary is courage and the commitment to undertake that journey.

Models of human fraternity

Msgr Yoannis Gaid then reminded those gathered that God always sends people who can change their belief in God into light for others. Both the Pope and the Grand Imam were able to produce a model of human fraternity because of their shared suffering for the sorrows of the world, he said. The Document is therefore a reminder of what people are suffering. True worshipers of God leads the believer to promote those human values which will heal the world's ills. Regarding diversity, he reiterated the point in the Document that it is part of God's plan. The goals in the Document must be embraced by everyone on earth if the Document is to become a reality. He ended saying that the Document is a roadmap that needs to be enshrined in laws and inserted into educational curriculum.

During the course of his remarks, Msgr Gaid revealed that Pope Francis had donated the full amount of the award that he had received last year (the Zayed Award for Human Fraternity) to the Rohingya people from Myanmar.

Voices of human fraternity

Those participating in the celebration then had the pleasure of listening to 6 people who have embraced various ideals of human fraternity:

Latifah Ibn Ziaten, Founder of Imad Association for Youth and Peace who lost her son to an act of terrorism who transformed her sorrow into reaching out to young people

Muhammad Saqib, Founder of Akhuwat Micro-Financing who heard the plea of a widow to borrow money without interest and who now manages the largest interest free micro-financing organization

Susan Esserman, Founder and Director of the University of Maryland Support, Advocacy, Freedom, and Empowerment (SAFE) Center for Human Trafficking Survivors

Daniel Pompei, Director of the Humanitarian Corridor of the St Egidio community

Yasmine Sherif, Director of Education Cannot Wait

Leymah Gbowee, Nobel Peace Prize Laureate who helped bring peace to her native Liberia and still advocates on behalf of peace

Celebration of Human Fraternity

After this introduction, the actual celebration kicked off. In addition to those already present, the UAE's Foreign Minister, Foreign Minister Abdullah bin Zayed Al Nahyan, joined the guests.

Both the Grand Imam, Ahmed Mohamed Ahmed el-Tayeb, and Pope Francis greeted the celebration participants through a prepared video message.

Members of the Higher Committee summarized the work they have been engaged in since it was formed in August. The Higher Committee then introduced their newest member, Leymah Gbowee who was given a warm round of applause.

The presence of many young people was notable. Students from the United States, Egypt and the UAE were on hand, taking part in the historical anniversary celebration. Bruce Lustig explained that it was important that students are present since it will take both world leader's on the top, and the world's students from below to make the Document real. Irina Bokova seconded the role of young people, saying that they are the "true messengers of human fraternity, empathy and solidarity".

Zayad Award for Human Fraternity to become annual

Sheik Abdullah bin Zayed Al Nahyan ended the ceremony noting that the signing of the Document during the Year of Tolerance was of great inspiration to the country. He then

announced that **the Zayed Award for Human Fraternity, which was given last year for the first time to Pope Francis and the Grand Imam of Al-Azhar, would now become an annual event.** In this way, the values reflected in the Document will be concretized in the annual honouring of those who embrace the values of human fraternity.