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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PHUM](#) [KIRF](#) [SOCI](#) [SCUL](#) [VT](#)

SUBJECT: AN INVENTORY OF THE VATICAN'S INTERFAITH DIALOGUES

REF: A. 08 VATICAN 87

[B](#). VATICAN 124

[C](#). 08 USUN 1126

[D](#). VATICAN 106

[E](#). VATICAN 122

[F](#). VATICAN 100

¶G. VATICAN 126

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CLASSIFIED BY: Julieta Valls Noyes, DCM, EXEC, State.

REASON: 1.4 (b)

¶1. (SBU) Summary: The Vatican is a leader or partner in many inter-religious dialogues, primarily with the "Abrahamic" religions - Islam, Judaism, and of course, other Christians. Vatican leaders are also beginning to reach out to Asian faiths. This cable describes the Vatican's primary, organized dialogues. Septels: A) analyze why the Vatican pursues interfaith dialogue, and B) propose USG-Holy See collaboration in support of such discussions. End Summary.

Dialogues with Muslim Communities and Nations

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¶2. (SBU) Formal, modern-day Vatican dialogue with the Muslim world goes back for over a decade. It intensified following September 11, 2001, and again after the controversy that erupted over Pope Benedict XVI's September 2006 address in Regensburg. Some of these dialogues have delivered concrete results; others remain largely symbolic. Following are the formal, institutionalized Vatican dialogues with Muslims:

-- Partnership with the Jordanian Royal Institute of Inter-Faith Studies. Held its first colloquium on "Religions and Civil Society" in Rome in 2009. Will meet every two years. The next meeting will be in 2011 in Amman or Rome. (Note: This institute is distinct from the Aal al-Bayt institute which is part of the Catholic Muslim Forum). (See [www.riifs.org](http://www.riifs.org).)

-- "A Common Word": The Catholic-Muslim Forum: First met in Rome November 4-6, 2008. Muslim delegates - both Sunni and Shia - selected by the Amman-based Aal al-Bayt Institute for Islamic

Thought. Final declaration called for religious freedom, protection of minorities, respect for religious symbols, and equal rights. Will meet every two years: 2010 Forum may meet in Jordan or another Muslim-majority country (ref a). (See [www.acommonword.com](http://www.acommonword.com).)

-- Saudi-sponsored dialogue: Initiated by Saudi King, through the Mecca-based Muslim World League (a.k.a. the Rabita). King of Spain hosted the first meeting in Madrid on July 18, 2008. Second meeting held on margins of 2008 UNGA, attended by then-President Bush and eighty-plus other senior officials. Participants criticized terrorists who claimed to act in the name of religion. Two additional meetings held in Vienna and Geneva; latest resulting in agreement to create secretariat -- and possibly new center -- for interreligious dialogue in Vienna, Austria (refs B and C). (See [www.world-dialogue.org](http://www.world-dialogue.org) )

-- The Congress of Leaders of World and Traditional Religions First held in 2003. Meets in Astana, Kazakhstan every three years. The next meeting will be in 2012. (See [www.religions-congress.org](http://www.religions-congress.org).)

-- Coordination Committee of the PCID and the World Islamic Call Society (WICS) of Libya. The focus of this meeting is relations between Muslims and Christians in sub-Saharan Africa, where the WICS is active. First held in 2002. Meets every two years in Tripoli or Rome. Next meeting in 2010.

-- The Joint Committee for Dialogue between the PCID and the Permanent Committee of Al-Azhar University in Cairo, for Dialogue between Monotheistic Religions. First held in 1998. Meets at the Al-Azhar University in Cairo every year.

-- Dialogue with Center for Inter-Religious Dialogue of the Islamic Culture and Relations Organization in Iran. This Vatican partnership with Iran's Islamic Guidance Ministry dates back to 1995. The subject of a recent meeting was "Human

dignity with special reference to bioethics." Meets in Tehran every two years. The next meeting is in 2010. (See <http://en.icro.ir> .)

-- The Islamic-Catholic Liaison Committee of the International Forum for Dialogue. First held in 1995. Meets in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia, every three years. Next meeting in 2012. (See [www.dialogueonline.org](http://www.dialogueonline.org).)

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#### Other Avenues for Catholic-Muslim Encounters

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¶3. (SBU) The Holy See and the Arab League established diplomatic relations in 2000. The League has a representative to the Holy See based in Rome, and the Vatican's representative to the League is the nuncio in Cairo. The Holy See and the League signed a Memorandum of Understanding on April 23, 2009, to strengthen joint projects to promote peace and dialogue, especially on the political and cultural levels. The Memorandum was signed by Archbishop Dominique Mamberti, the Holy See's Secretary of Relations with States, and Arab League Secretary General Amr Moussa. Vatican officials note that the MOU has not yet led to any concrete initiatives or dialogues.

¶4. (C) The Pontifical Council for Inter-religious Dialogue signed a "Declaration of Intent" with the Department for Religious Affairs of the Turkish Prime Minister's Cabinet on April 25, 2002. Its aim was to promote inter-religious dialogue, in particular by facilitating collaboration between academic institutions. Progress in discussions with the Turks is not coming quickly. The Vatican is disappointed that the former Church of Paul of Tarsus is now a Turkish government-run museum. The Vatican also supports Orthodox demands to reopen

the Halki seminary in Turkey, have the GOT recognize the Ecumenical Patriarch as an international religious leader, and grant greater religious freedoms to Orthodox and other Christians.

¶5. (SBU) Cardinal Jean-Louis Tauran, President of the Inter-Religious Dialogue Council, travelled to Indonesia in November 2009. It was the first visit of the Vatican's top dialogue official to Indonesia, the largest Muslim-majority country in the world -- 206 million out of a population of 240 million. (There are 7 million Catholics in the country.) Vatican and Indonesian officials continue to discuss concrete initiatives for follow-up to this visit.

The Other Monotheistic Faiths: Jews and other Christians

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¶6. (SBU) Unlike relations with Islam, Vatican relations with Jews are characterized by substantial theological common ground and historic roots. Discussions between the two religions are ongoing and broad-based. They are often intersected by politics, and sometimes hurt by missteps. The Vatican's long-standing dialogue initiatives with the Jews prospered in the years since the Vatican II Council removed obstacles to good relations. They took a big hit in January 2009, however, when the Vatican restored communion to a schismatic Catholic group that included a Holocaust-denying bishop. After considerable effort by the Vatican and the Pope himself, relations have been largely mended and were solidified with the Pope's visit to the Holy Land in May 2009. Nevertheless, the proposed conferral of sainthood on WWII-era Pope Pius XII and access by historians to the archives of his pontificate are recurring irritants in the relationship (ref D).

¶7. (SBU) Meanwhile, Vatican officials speak constantly with followers of other Christian faiths in ecumenical dialogue intended to overcome divisions between Christians. Indeed, the

Vatican has a separate Pontifical Council for Christian Unity (which for historical reasons also covers dialogue with Jews). These discussions have their ups and downs. While the Vatican move in November 2009 to welcome disaffected Anglicans to the Catholic Church dealt a blow to ecumenical understanding (ref E), the rift is healing in part because few Anglicans will probably take advantage of the Vatican offer. Meanwhile, relations with the Russian Orthodox Patriarch of Moscow -- who commands the allegiance of a large number of Orthodox and is thus arguably more influential than Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew -- have improved. (ref F). This has allowed Moscow and the Vatican to upgrade their "special character" to "full diplomatic" relations (ref G).

¶8. (SBU) Ultimately, the monotheistic nature and shared historic roots of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam -- all "people of the book" - make dialogue between these three religions easier for the Vatican in some ways than discussions with other religions. An important interfaith meeting including senior leaders of the world's major monotheistic religions, Christians (Catholic and

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Orthodox), Jews and Muslims, took place in Seville, Spain, December 6-8, 2009. The King of Spain's "Three Cultures, Three Faiths" Foundation sponsored the event. (VATICAN 124).

Outreach to Asian Faiths

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¶9. (C) Despite the difficulty for the Vatican of finding common ground with polytheistic religions, Holy See officials are starting to do just that in an effort to support peace, religious freedom, human rights, and local solutions to local problems (see septel). Cardinal Tauran travelled to India in June 2009 for initial dialogue with Hindus. Tauran's goal was

to go beyond the positive assurances that had characterized previous meetings with Hindu leaders. Specifically, he sought to bridge the gap between his Indian interlocutors' stated goodwill and the continuing hostility toward Christians in parts of India like Orissa, especially by some Hindu nationalists. The Vatican also raised concerns about Indian anti-conversion laws -- although they have not been enforced. Cardinal Tauran also traveled to Japan in August 2009, to initiate discussions with Buddhists and other Asian faiths.

¶10. (SBU) Comment: Tauran acknowledges quietly that the Vatican has not paid sufficient attention to relations with Asian religions. He is not an expert on polytheistic religions and is unlikely to find -- or even seek -- common theological ground with their precepts. Instead, as he and his Council increase their outreach to these communities, they will challenge their interlocutors to remove obstacles to the enjoyment of religious freedom for all. End comment.

Comment

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¶11. (C) The number and scope of the Vatican's inter-religious dialogues is unparalleled by that of any other church or organization in the world. The dialogues are already effective in preventing or smoothing over misunderstandings and tensions. The big question is how to translate into concrete actions the high moral principles that the world's major religions bring to the dialogue table. Septel includes proposals for USG engagement with the Vatican in support of interreligious understanding and action.

DIAZ