

Pope Francis commends Ayatollah Sistani for commitment to peace and unity

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Iraq's prominent cleric Grand Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani (L) meets with Pope Francis, head of the

Roman Catholic Church, in Najaf, on March 6, 2021. (Via office of Ayatollah Sistani)

Vatican City, March 16 (RHC)-- Back on March 8, 2021, the pontiff held a meeting with the spiritual leader of Iraqi Shias during his unprecedented visit to the Arab country in what is seen as a landmark interfaith meeting. Pope Francis addressed Ayatollah Sistani as his "dear brother" in the letter, describing the meeting as "a milestone on the path of interreligious dialogue and understanding between peoples."

The Pope also commended the top cleric for "his commitment to those who suffered persecution, preserving the sacredness of life and the importance of the unity of the Iraqi people."

The letter, which was published by the Holy See Press Office on Tuesday, was also sent to address a conference in Najaf entitled "Catholics and Shias facing the future" held on the occasion of the 2nd anniversary of Pope Francis's visit to Iraq. The event, held on March 8-10, was organized by the Community of Sant'Egidio and the Al_Khoei Institute of Najaf and was attended by a number of Shia and Christian religious leaders.

"Collaboration and friendship between believers of different religions are indispensable, in order to cultivate not only mutual esteem but above all that concord that contributes to the good of humanity, as the recent history of Iraq teaches us," wrote the Pope.

According to the pontiff, faith-based communities must be "a privileged place of communion and a symbol of peaceful coexistence, in which we invoke the Creator of all, for a future of unity on earth." He noted that "respect for the dignity and rights of every person and every community, especially freedom of religion, thought and expression, is a source of personal and social serenity and harmony between peoples."

Accordingly, religious leaders are duty-bound to "encourage those with responsibilities in civil society to work to affirm a culture based on justice and peace, promoting political actions that protect the fundamental rights of each person," added the pontiff.

"It is essential that the human family rediscover a sense of fraternity and mutual acceptance, as a concrete response to today's challenges," the Pope continued, expressing his hope that together, Christians and Muslims, may always be "witnesses of truth, love and hope, in a world scarred by numerous conflicts and therefore in need of compassion and healing."

During the meeting in March 2021, Ayatollah Sistani pointed to the role of belief in God and commitment to high moral values ??in overcoming challenges facing today's world, including justice, oppression, poverty, religious persecution, repression of fundamental freedoms, and wars.

The top cleric also touched upon the importance of efforts to strengthen peaceful coexistence and solidarity based on mutual respect among the followers of different religions and intellectual groups.

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