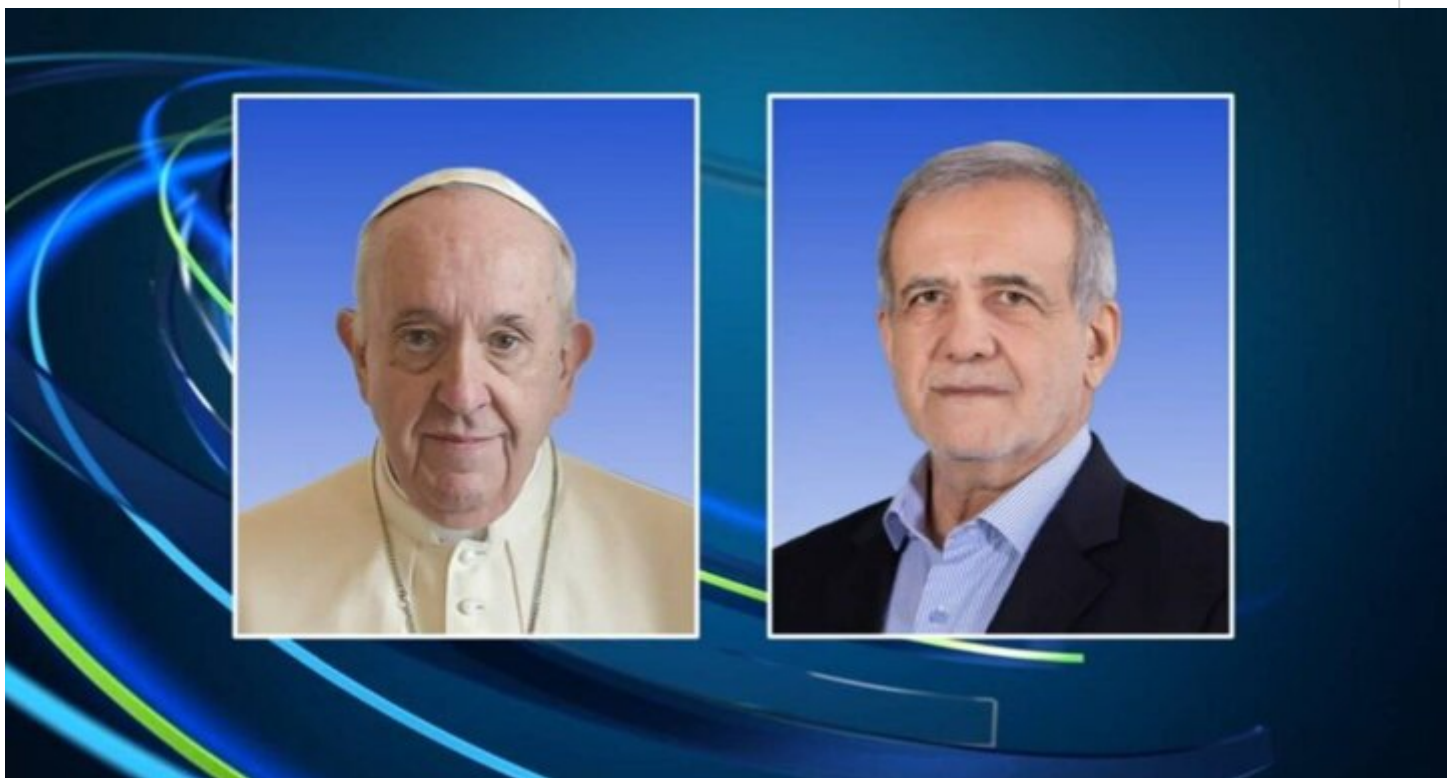


Iranian president urges Pope Frances to help end Israeli onslaught in Gaza



Rome, November 24 (RHC)-- A joint meeting between the Vatican's dicastery for inter-religious dialog and the Iranian center for inter-religious and intercultural dialog has wrapped up in Rome.

The theme of the meeting this year was 'Family and education, a challenge for Christians and Muslims.' The two-day event, attended by the head of the Catholic Church, Pope Francis, reaffirmed the crucial role of the family unit in shaping children's engagement at a time when traditional families are greatly under attack worldwide.

The attendees also discussed the topic of religious minorities in Iran and how these minorities are institutionally protected by the Iranian authorities.

Pope Francis himself stressed how Christian minorities in Iran are allowed to freely meet together and worship in churches across the country, without restriction. Also, Iran's policy of seeking stability in the region is a way to protect Christians and Jews as well.

President Pezeshkian has written to Pope Francis, requesting his efforts to help bring a halt to Israel's barbarism amid the explosive situation in the region.

The first round of religious dialog between the Vatican and Iran took place in the Italian capital 25 years ago.

Iran and the Vatican have had formal diplomatic relations since 1954 and ties have been maintained after the Iranian Revolution, despite the US cutting ties with Tehran in 1980.

Many Vatican diplomats have greater confidence in the protection of Christians in West Asia by Iran than by the Western powers, who, in their judgment, simply don't take religion seriously as a sort of identity.

Also on the sidelines of the joint meeting, the head of Iran's Islamic culture and relations organization, Mohamad Mahdi Imanipur, presented Pope Francis with a message from the Iranian President, Masoud Pezeshkian.

In his message, the Iranian president urged the pontiff to help end more than a year of brutal Israeli attacks on Gaza and also the onslaught on Lebanon, saying these barbaric strikes continue extensively in violation of international law and regulations.

In his message, President Pezeshkian stressed the importance of Iran's policy of strategic patience, which has avoided further escalation of conflict in West Asia, referring to Iran's delayed response to Israeli's assassination of Hamas, political leader Ismail Haniyeh in Tehran.

Meanwhile, as the Israeli crimes in Gaza continue with no end in sight, Pope Francis has called for an investigation to determine whether Israel is committing genocide in the besieged territory.

Father Tim Biren, a Catholic priest attending the meeting, told reporters: "Well, certainly from the very beginning when he was named Pope Francis, from the very beginning, he has been trying to find peaceful resolutions to all conflicts, and with these most recent conflicts that have developed in the world, I can only see that he's trying to stay true to his vision for the church."

The Iranian delegation will hold other meetings with Italy's Vice Minister of Culture as well as with university representatives in the coming days.

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