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**MIDWEST MUSLIM-CATHOLIC DIALOGUE COMPLETES LATEST ROUND,
MUSLIMS AND CATHOLICS IN THE PUBLIC SQUARE, AND LOOKS AHEAD TO
2012 NATIONAL PLENARY**

WASHINGTON—Representatives of the Midwest Muslim-Catholic Dialogue convened at the Catholic Theological Union in Chicago, October 9 and 10, to discuss the final works of the completed round and to begin preparations for a planned national plenary for October 2012. The Dialogue is co-chaired by auxiliary Bishop Francis R. Reiss of the Archdiocese of Detroit and Sayyid M. Syeed, Ph.D., of the Islamic Society of North America (ISNA).

In his opening remarks on Muslims and Catholics working together in the public square, Bishop Reiss reminded the representatives that the drift into cultural relativism threatens to release forces of chaos and violence as was evidenced recently in the London riots.

“When young people ... are deprived of a formation that ... encourages their lifelong commitment to the transcendental values of absolute goodness, truth, and beauty,” the bishop said, “it is then that we risk abandoning our fellow human beings to the culture of death, that is, a culture without God.” He added, “Should we not together strive to shed light on the emergent chasm of irrationality and hopelessness that threatens our fellow citizens? Of course we should.”

Dr. Syeed affirmed the bishop’s remarks, saying that “the time to act is now.” While acknowledging the dangers of modern culture, he also endeavored to celebrate the recent attempts of Muslim youth in certain regions of the Middle East to embrace the positive values of democracy that “provide our greatest hope for the realization of religious freedom and peace.”

“Here is a sign that shows the world how democracy is a great good,” he said. He warned that Catholics and Muslims must work together to encourage these efforts so that secular relativism does not derail them. Dr. Syeed praised recent efforts to establish interreligious networks committed to building trust and solidarity across the spectrum of belief. He cited the establishment of *Shoulder to Shoulder: Standing with American Muslims, Upholding American*

Values as an excellent example of an interreligious network of leaders committed to working together to end Islamophobia and threats to religious freedom everywhere.

To mark the end of this current round, members provided concluding remarks on the latest publication efforts regarding the topic of Catholics and Muslims in the public square. Father Thomas Baima, University of St. Mary of the Lake in Chicago, distributed the recently published spring 2011 edition of *Chicago Studies*, which features the collected papers of dialogue members. It can be found at: <http://chicagostudies.org/issues/2011-1.asp>

Members were presented with an outline of a joint written project on Catholics and Muslims in the public square. It will be a resource for local religious leaders and is meant for popular dissemination. Members also broached the subject of a national plenary for 2012, to convene the three national Muslim-Catholic Dialogues. The agenda will be coordinated by the chairpersons of each dialogue and the Secretariat of Ecumenical and Interreligious Affairs of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB).

Participating members of the dialogue were: Irfan Omar, Ph.D., Marquette University; Dominican Sister Joan McGuire, Archdiocese of Chicago; Judith Longdin, Archdiocese of Milwaukee; Father David Bruning, St. Caspar Church, Wauseon, Ohio; Father Raymond Webb, University of St. Mary of the Lake; Ghulam-Haider Aasi, Ph.D., American Islamic College; Father Tom Baima, University of St. Mary of the Lake; Scott Alexander, Ph.D., Catholic Theological Union; Shakeela Hassan, Ph.D., Harran Foundation, Chicago; Josh Jones, Catholic Theological Union; Syeed Sayeed, Ph.D., ISNA; Bishop Francis Reiss, Archdiocese of Detroit; Father Jeff Day, Archdiocese of Detroit; Anthony Cirelli, Ph.D., USCCB staff; Zeki Saritoprak, Ph.D., John Carroll University; and Imam Kareem Irfan, Council of Religious Leaders of Metropolitan Chicago.

Keywords: Midwest Muslim-Catholic Dialogue, round, Bishop Francis Reiss, Sayyid Syeed, faith, public square, secularism, relativism, culture of death, USCCB, U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, U.S. bishops, Islamic Society of North America, 2012 plenary

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