

UNITED STATES
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NEWS

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FROM: William Ryan

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BISHOPS AND MUSLIM PRESIDENTS REJECT TERRORISM-RELIGION LINK

WASHINGTON--The President of an Islamic organization and the President of the National Conference of Catholic Bishops have issued a joint statement rejecting any effort to claim religious sanction for acts of aggression and terrorism.

"Together we urge all not to impugn whole peoples or their religions because of the despicable acts of some," they said.

"Aggression and terrorism wherever they occur are to be condemned since they constitute an illegitimate use of force and therefore violate the law of God. This we affirm without qualification.

"With equally strong resolve we reject any effort to claim a religious inspiration or sanction for such contemptible acts. This misguided contention disfigures religion itself," they said.

The joint statement was made public today (April 17) by Dr. Mahmoud Abu-Saud, President of the American Muslim Council; and Archbishop William H. Keeler of Baltimore, President of the National Conference of Catholic Bishops.

The statement--the first ever issued jointly by the heads of these two national organizations--comes against the background of the World Trade Center bombing in New York, its aftermath, and similar recent acts of violence around the world. It constitutes a common set of general principles to guide discussion of these incidents.

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Commenting on the statement, Archbishop Keeler said: "As President of the NCCB, I welcome this opportunity to join with the President of the Muslim Council, Dr. Mahmoud Abu-Saud, our partner in dialogue, in addressing a matter which has been of great concern to all Americans and to people everywhere. This occasion is significant because the gravity of the topic has moved us to affirm these common values and because this is the first joint action of the Presidents of our two organizations."

Archbishop Keeler and Dr. Abu-Saud also reaffirmed their commitment to Christian-Muslim dialogue for eradicating misunderstanding and for the pursuit of common values, such as justice, peace, and respect for creation. Mutual understanding and growth in the religious life are prominent goals in interreligious dialogue and relations.

The joint statement on religion and terrorism is the first bilateral statement issued by the NCCB and AMC; it is not the first time the two organizations have joined in a written statement. On October 6, 1992, Cardinal Bernard Law, Chairman of the NCCB Committee on Migration, signed an interfaith appeal for Balkan refugees with representatives of the American Muslim Council, the National Council of Churches, the American Jewish Committee, and the Standing Conference of Canonical Orthodox Bishops in America. In November Dr. Abu-Saud's name was added to those of Cardinal Law and others in letters to the Presidents of the United States, the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, the Republics of Bosnia and Yugoslavia for the same rescue appeal.

The statement springs from a relationship established between the AMC and NCCB through a Catholic/Muslim national dialogue which they coordinate. The first meeting took place in October, 1991 and the second in October, 1992 with Dr. Abu-Saud and Bishop Joseph Gerry of Portland, Maine, NCCB Episcopal Moderator for Interreligious Relations, co-presiding.

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Several Catholic dioceses sponsor bilateral dialogues with Muslims while others send representatives to councils and commissions where Christians, Muslims, Jews and others come together on a regular basis. In their statement, Archbishop Keeler and Dr. Abu-Saud urged Catholics and Muslims to continue these efforts and to pray and act in behalf of common values.

"On January 9," Archbishop Keeler observed, "I had the wonderful honor of attending prayers in a mosque and to host the Imam of the Islamic Society in Baltimore for prayers at the Basilica of the Assumption of the Virgin Mary. Several religious leaders joined us for a pilgrimage to houses of prayer in Baltimore for peace in the Balkans, and we were together in spirit through our journeying, fasting and praying with those religious leaders gathered with Pope John Paul II in Assisi on the same day. Today, I am also honored to join with Dr. Abu-Saud in this first joint statement of our organizations," Archbishop Keeler stated.

NOTE: For further information contact Mr. Abdurahman Alamoudi, Executive Director, American Muslim Council, 202-789-2262, and Dr. John Borelli, Interreligious Relations, National Conference of Catholic Bishops, 202-541-3020.

The joint statement on religion and terrorism follows:

As the Presidents of two organizations that have been co-directing a national dialogue between Catholics and Muslims for two years, we declare our agreement on general principles to guide discussions of such incidents as the bombing of the World Trade Center in New York.

Together we urge all not to impugn whole peoples or their religions because of the despicable acts of some.

Aggression and terrorism wherever they occur are to be condemned since they constitute an illegitimate use of force and therefore violate the law of God. This we affirm without qualification.

With equally strong resolve we reject any effort to claim a religious inspiration or sanction for such contemptible acts. This misguided contention disfigures religion itself.

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It is important at this time for us to reaffirm our commitment to one another. A major goal of Christian-Muslim dialogue is to eradicate misrepresentations of Islam, Christianity, and the history of Christian-Muslim relations. Another goal is to cooperate in pursuit of common values, in particular, justice, peace, and respect for creation.

We are encouraged by the fact that dialogue between Catholics and Muslims is already taking place in several American cities. As the Presidents of the American Muslim Council and of the National Conference of Catholic Bishops we call upon our faithful to come together to dialogue, to pray, and to act in behalf of our common values.

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