

Assisi 2011: religions to renew their commitment to peace and justice



As the initiative of Benedict XVI, this event is designed to mark the 25th anniversary of the first Assisi meeting (pictured) and is meant "to be a dream that continues,

becoming more and more a reality. As everyone is with others, no one is against others. Marching from various points on earth, all nations come together as a one family."

Christianity will be represented by 31 delegations, Judaism by the International Committee on Interreligious Consultation, the Chief Rabbi of Israel and other international Jewish organisations. Other religions will be represented as well: Five Hindu leaders, 3 Jains, 5 Sikhs, 1 Zoroastrian and 1 Baha'i, 67 Buddhists and the heads of 16 delegations from 11 countries, including the People's Republic of China. The president of the Confucian Association will come from South Korea, the president of the Taoist Association will come from Hong Kong, and two Shinto delegations will come from Japan. Representatives from four new religions will also be present. There will be 48 Muslims, from Jordan, Israel, Egypt, Lebanon, Algeria, Morocco, Iran, Turkey, Saudi Arabia, Albania, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Azerbaijan, Tajikistan, as well as some Western countries.

Representatives of traditional religions will come from Africa, America and Asia as well as four invited non-believers. More than 50 nations will be represented.

These are the numbers of the "Day of reflection, dialogue and prayer for justice and peace in the world" that will be held in Assisi on 27 October, that were presented this morning in the Vatican. The theme of the Day, said Cardinal Peter Kodwo Appiah Turkson, president of the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, is "Pilgrims of truth, pilgrims of peace". It aims "to show, with simplicity, that as religious men and men of good will, we want to offer our own articulated contribution to the building of a better world, whilst at the same time acknowledge the need to grow in dialogue and mutual esteem so as to improve the efficacy of our actions."

Thus, in addition to praying and fasting, the experience of Assisi 2011, will exhibit the "the numbers of pilgrimage, which is something that implies ascent, purification, convergence towards a higher point, undertaking a communal task."

At 8 am on 27 October, the various delegations will leave the Vatican by train with the pope. After arriving in Assisi at 9.45 am, participants will visit the Basilica di S. Maria degli Angeli (St. Mary of the Angels). There will be a commemoration service for the past meetings and a discussion on the day's topic.

Many religious leaders are expected to address the meeting. They include the Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew I, the Archbishop of Canterbury Dr Rowan Douglas Williams, the Secretary General of the Ecumenical Council of Churches Rev Olav Pykkö Tveit, the Secretary General of the International Conference of Islamic Schools, and the representative of the Great Rabbi of Israel, Rabbi David Rosen.

A "frugal meal" shared by all the delegates will follow. The latter is "meant to express coming together in brotherhood and, at the same time, the sharing of the suffering of so many men and women who do not know peace." Then, there will be a moment of silence to give each participant an opportunity to reflect and pray.

In the afternoon, everyone will join a pilgrimage towards the Basilica of St Francis. The procession will be in silence so that participants will be able to pray and meditate on their own.

The event will end in front of the basilica with renewed solemn vows to work together for peace.

Aleksandr, of the Moscow Patriarchate, Rev Setri Nyomi, General Secretary of the World Alliance of Reformed Churches, and various Muslim leaders will also address the gathering. Islam will also be represented by various delegates. The king of Saudi Arabia will be represented by the Saudi Vice Minister of Education Faisal Al Muammer, the king of Morocco by Waqf and Islamic Affairs Minister Ahmad Tawfiq, and the Jordanian royal family by Prince Ghazi bin Muhammad.

The return to the Vatican is scheduled for 8.30 pm.

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