

Christians and Hindus: Together in Promoting Religious Freedom

Vatican City: Message for The Feast of Deepavali 201

Dear Hindu Friends,



1. The Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue is pleased to send you its cordial greetings as you celebrate Deepavali on 26 October of this year. May God, the source of all light, illumine your hearts, homes and communities for a life of peace and prosperity,

2. Maintaining our tradition of sharing a reflection on this occasion, we propose this year the theme of Religious Freedom. This subject is currently taking centre stage in many places, calling our attention to those members of our human family exposed to bias, prejudice, hate propaganda, discrimination and persecution on the basis of religious affiliation. Religious freedom is the answer to religiously motivated conflicts in many parts of the world. Amid the violence triggered by these conflicts, many desperately yearn for peaceful coexistence and integral human development.

3. Religious freedom is numbered among the fundamental human rights rooted in the dignity of the human person. When it is jeopardized or denied, all other human rights are endangered. Religious freedom necessarily includes immunity from coercion by any individual, group, community or institution. Though the exercise of this right entails the freedom of every person to profess, practise and propagate his or her religion or belief, in public or in private, alone or in a community, it also involves a serious obligation on the part of civil authorities, individuals and groups to respect the freedom of others. Moreover, it includes the freedom to change one's own religion.

4. When respected and promoted, religious freedom allows believers to be more enthusiastic about cooperating with their fellow citizens in the building of a just and humane social order. But wherever and whenever it is denied, suppressed or violated, "the growth of the authentic and lasting peace of the

whole human family" is stifled and frustrated (cf. Pope Benedict XVI, Message for the World Day of Peace, 2011). There are many fields in which a specific contribution can be made to the common good, such as the defence of life and the dignity of the family, the sound education of children, honesty in daily conduct, and the preservation of natural resources, to name a few. Let us strive, then, to join hands in promoting religious freedom as our shared responsibility, by asking the leaders of nations never to disregard the religious dimension of the human person.

5. The very day after you celebrate Deepavali this year, many religious leaders from across the globe will join Pope Benedict XVI in a Pilgrimage to Assisi to renew the pledge made twenty-five years ago, under the leadership of Blessed John Paul II, to make religions channels of peace and harmony. We will be spiritually united with them, confident that believers will always be a blessing for the whole world.

We cordially wish you a joyful celebration of Deepavali.

Cardinal Jean-Louis Tauran

President

Archbishop Pier Luigi Celata

Secretary

PCID - Vatican