



**Discourse of His Eminence Cardinal Jean-Louis Tauran**  
***President of the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue***  
**at the visit to**  
**His Excellency**  
**Sheikh Prof. Dr. Muhammad Abdul Karim Al-Issa**  
***Secretary General of the Muslim World League***  
**Riyadh, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, Saturday 14 April 2018**

Your Excellency,

Dear Friends of Ràbita,

The same Divine Providence which guided your steps to Rome to meet with H.H. Pope Francis and with us, at the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue, on September 21, 2017, has brought us too to the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, the birth place of Islam and homeland of the two most important holy places for Muslims, Mecca and Medina. It is towards Mecca that Muslims direct their faces in any place of the world, so turning themselves to the Face of the Almighty God; it is to this land that millions of Muslims come for Hajj or for *'Umrah*.

Our Holy Places, be they in the Holy land or in Rome or elsewhere along with numerous sacred shrines in many places of the world, are always open to you – our Muslim brothers and sisters –, to the believers of other religions and also to every person of good will, not professing any particular religion.

In many countries, mosques are also open for visitors. This is a kind of spiritual hospitality that helps promoting mutual knowledge and friendship, countering at the same time prejudices.

Since your nomination, Your Excellency, at the head of the Muslim World League, you have been working tirelessly with great sense of openness, zeal and determination. I do not intend to make here the list of your numerous initiatives but I am quite aware of the fact that you are doing your best to make the name of your organization *'Ràbita'* and its program known true for what the name stands for. The Arabic term *ràbita* means "link". It connotes therefore fostering relations, building bridges, a concept dear to saint Pope John Paul II and to Pope Francis as well. This is precisely what you are doing not only among Muslims, but also with believers of other religions, especially Christians.

Religion is what a person has as the dearest. This is why some persons, when called to choose between losing their faith and keeping their life, prefer to remain faithful to their faith, accepting to pay a high price: the loss of their life. These are the martyrs of all religions and of all times.

We are all aware that for a community of believers although there is only one religion, there are various approaches to this religion. This is why there are in all religions radicals and, fortunately, also wise people. Radicals, fundamentals or extremists might be persons with zeal but who unfortunately have deviated from a sound and wise understanding of their religion. Besides, they consider those who do not share their vision of religion as not being true believers, misbelievers, *kuffâr*. These *kuffâr* should ‘convert’ or be eliminated, so as to keep the purity of religion. These deviated brothers and sisters can easily pass from radicalism to violence in the name of religion, including terrorism. These persons are convinced or are made such through brain-washing, that they are serving God! The truth is that they are only harming themselves, destroying others, damaging the image of their religion and of their fellow believers. These persons need our prayer and help to come back to reason, normality and to a sound understanding of religion.

Christians and Muslims alike, we love our religion, would like to call others to embrace it. We consider this a religious must. This is for Christians mission or evangelization; for Muslims, *da‘wa*. The qur‘anic order “Invite to the way of *your Lord with wisdom and good instruction*” (16, 125) is a rule that Christians can accept. This rule excludes certain attitudes and practices and imposes others: this is ethics of mission. Our common agreement on these ethics is of first importance for respectful and peaceful relations.

What should be excluded from *da‘wa* and mission is the tentative of imposing one’s religion on others: religion can be proposed, never imposed, then accepted or refused. Threat enters in the category of exercising violence to obtain conversions. The qur‘anic affirmation “there is no compulsion in religion” (2, 256) is fundamental for freedom of conscience and of religion.

If we agree the ban constraint in religious matter, another rule is not to ‘buy’ converts, offering money or privileges, like work, promotion, study grants. This is why liking humanitarian aid to the change of religion is unethical and should be avoided. A person in need should be helped by a believer for God’s sake *li-wajh Allah* and out of a sense of humanity.

Another field we need to agree upon is common rules for the construction of places of worship. It is one of the fields on which much competition took place in the past between our two communities.

A place of worship should respond to the real need of a determined religious community to have an appropriate place where to gather for public prayer. The construction of places of worship should be in harmony with the urbanistic landscape and abide to the just laws of the State/s as per urbanistic is concerned. In such cases religions are not above the law but should obey to it. All religions should be treated equally, without discrimination among them, because their followers, along with the citizens who do not profess any religion should be treated equally. “Full citizenship” of all citizens is a threshold for all countries in a world becoming always more interreligious and intercultural. By so doing, it will be clear that the believers, all believers, are also believers. Therefore, not citizens or believers, but citizens and believers.

The ‘rules’ and principles I am proposing seem to me to be fair. What is just makes us and also the religions we belong credible. Double standards, as we are all aware, harm the image of a person, of a community, of a country and of a religion.

Besides, if we do not ban double standards from our behavior as believers, religious institutions and organizations, we will nourish, certainly without paying attention, islamophobia or christianophobia. On a positive note, the golden rule which is present in Islam, in Christianity and in other religions as well, encourages us to treat others as we like them to treat us.

Your Excellency,

Dear Friends,

Since fifty years many obstacles have been overcome, as for example the distinction between proselytism and mission. The dimension of testimony and mutual prayer is more present. In front of a cultural crisis that shaped the world and when the references crashed, the return of the irrational could be detected. In such context, the duty of spiritual leaders is the following: to avoid that religions be at the service of an ideology. Another duty of religious leaders is education: this is a must. We have to be pedagogues and also have to recognize. Honesty obliges us to recognize that some of our fellow believers, for example, the terrorists, are not behaving correctly. Terrorism is a permanent threat, this is why we should be clear and therefore never trying to justify terrorism by religious motivations. We believe that what terrorists want to show that it is impossible to live together. We believe the exact contrary! We should avoid aggression, ignorance and the denigration of other religions. Religious pluralism is an invitation to reflect about our faith, because every true interreligious dialogue begins with the proclamation of one's faith. We do not say that all religions are equal, but that all believers, all God seekers and all persons of good will without any religious affiliation are equal in dignity. Every person should be left free to embrace the religion he/she likes. What is threatening us all is not the clash of civilizations, but the clash of ignorances and the clash of radicalisms. What threatens the living together is first of all ignorance; therefore meeting, speaking to each other, knowing each other, building something together is an invitation to encountering the other, which is also discovering ourselves.

Let us therefore join our efforts in order that God Who has created us not be a motive of division, but of unity. At this regard, it is with gratitude to Almighty God and joy that the Pontifical Council observes the efforts *Ràbita* is doing to have positive and constructive relations with believers of other religions, especially Christians. We also encourage and support these efforts because, among others, the particular religious and spiritual bonds existing between us, because of the numerical importance of Muslims and Christians in the world, also because they live together in most countries of the world. We have to choose between peaceful and friendly relations, or, God forbids, conflictual relations. Peace in the world depends much on peace between Christians and Muslims!

The signing of a Declaration of Intent between *Ràbita* and the PCID is a meaningful step on the journey of fraternity, friendship and collaboration we are all firmly engaged to. May God bless our efforts aimed at His greatest glory and at the good of Muslims and Christians and the entire humanity!

Thank you Excellency, for your kindness, generosity and friendship, so dear to us all! Our gratitude goes also to all your staff.