

MEETING WITH PAPAL DELEGATION: INTERFAITH DIALOGUE
ARCHBISHOP CATHOLIC CHURCH, DHAKA

06th September, 2025

- i. Your Excellency Cardinal Koovakad, Prefect of Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue and Eminent guests from the Vatican Dicastery
- ii. Your Excellency Bejoy N. D'Cruze, Archbishop of Dhaka and esteemed members of the Archdiocese of Dhaka
- iii. Your Excellency Archbishop Kevin Randal, Apostolic Nuncio and accompanying representatives from the Apostolic Nunciature
- iv. Ladies and gentlemen

Good evening,

It is both a profound honor and a solemn privilege to stand before this distinguished assembly, gathered in the spirit of interreligious cooperation and mutual understanding. I extend my heartfelt gratitude to the Apostolic Nuncio and to the Catholic Church in Bangladesh for arranging the delegation from the Dicastery for Interreligious Dialogue, as well as to the Office of the Honorable Chief Adviser for their gracious role in hosting the scheduled events and the instant gathering. I would also be deeply obliged, if the esteemed members from the Holy See would kindly convey my wholehearted appreciation back to His Holiness Pope Leo XIV, for his commitment to inter-faith unity.

By a happy coincidence, today's dialogue takes place on the occasion of *Eid-E-Miladunnobi*, the commemoration of the birth and death anniversaries of the Holy Prophet Hazrat Muhammad (Peace Be Upon Him). His life and message offered humanity a path toward kindness, peace and equity reminding mankind that the highest calling is to uphold dignity, extend mercy, and live in harmony. Standing in an isolated desert 1400 years ago, he declared in his last sermon: "*All mankind is from Adam and Eve; an Arab has no superiority over a non-Arab, nor a non-Arab over an Arab; a White has no superiority over a Black, nor a Black over a White – except by piety and good action.*"

Excellencies,

Religious plurality had remained a constant uplifting feature for human civilization. Personal-animosity and communal-confrontation were not born of faith itself, but of the ancient struggles of state and empires. As Bertrand Russell observed in his book *Human Society in Ethics and Politics*, faith is too often used to rearm ourselves in conflict. For faith, when misused, becomes a potent force for deepening hatred and for justifying the persecution of others. In contrast, major religions always guided us toward peace and justice. For example, The Holy Prophet Hazrat Muhammad (Peace Be Upon Him) convened in Medina what we would now call a ‘trialogue’, bringing Jews, Christians, and Muslims together to discuss on their respective faiths.

A remarkable instance in the forging of early Islam’s nationhood is the Charter of Medina which is acclaimed as the world’s first written constitution. Drafted by the Holy Prophet Hazrat Muhammad (Peace Be Upon Him) upon his migration to Medina, it confederated Muslims, Jews, and other tribes into a single polity premised on mutual rights and responsibilities. The Charter attests to the legal moorings of Islam’s socio-political philosophy and this 7th Century pluralistic and federative social compact underwritten by an ethos of multi-faith inclusivity appeals to us most this *Eid-e-Miladunnabi*. The document proclaimed freedom of faith, security for life, and certainty of property for every group, in return for their promise to stand by both fellow townsmen and immigrants against the acts of aggression. This covenant epitomized that social harmony does not depend on uniformity, but on cooperation among the compatriots, on equality before the law and on the dignity of every individual.

Along with Islam, other faiths, too, uphold compassion as a central goal and sacred virtue. Despite the dissimilarities, many religions converge on various uniform teachings. Christianity and Islam, in particular, share a common origin in the Abrahamic tradition and carry striking similarities. Islam calls us to surrender to God’s compassionate will which embraces all humanity, while Christianity calls believers to love people of every faith as God’s image-bearers. Instead of offering resistance to peripheral differences, we all are encouraged to recognize them as part of the beautiful design by the Almighty. As the Quran says, “*And of His signs is the creation of the heavens and the earth and the diversity of your languages and your colors.*” (Chapter 30: Verse 22) The Bible, on the other hand, instructs us to practice tolerance even in the face of disagreement. As the New International Version declares, “*We who are strong ought to bear with the failings of the weak and not to please ourselves*” (Romans Chapter 15: Verse 1).

Your Excellency Cardinal Koovakad,

I am pleased to recall that, in the aftermath of the horrors of Second World War, the Christian Church placed renewed emphasis on interfaith dialogue. Muslims and Christians have sat together in many parts of the world since to build bridges of understanding. From these encounters emerged meaningful acts of mutual recognition.

In this spirit, the Constitution of the People's Republic of Bangladesh preserves the same principle. Under Article 41, every citizen is free to profess, practice, and promote their theological beliefs without fear, obstacle, or interference. At the same time, each religious community is assured the right to set up, sustain, and govern its own places of worship. Complementing this, Article 28 champions the principle of non-discrimination. It affirms that no citizen shall face inequality on the grounds of religion, race, caste, gender, or birth-place. These Articles are so firmly protected that they are placed within the part of our Constitution known as 'Fundamental Rights,' making clear that even lawmakers cannot curtail or withhold them.

As humans, we carry the unique capacity to reengineer our attachments and identities through education and exchange of experience. If prejudice can be learned, it can also be unlearned. With conscious effort, human society can rise above partisanship by cultivating compassion, empathy and love. If humanity has been able to formulate rules for the conduct of war through international law, surely the rules of peace should not be beyond our reach. Article 1 of the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* is a pledge we all share: "*All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. They are endowed with reason and conscience and should act towards one another in a spirit of brotherhood.*" These words are a reminder that our reason and conscience can defeat the walls of race and religion. Central to this transformation is the recognition that 'othering' and 'sectarianism' are corrosive not only to their victims, but equally to those who perpetuate them. Nobel Laureate Amartya Sen argues in his book *Identity and Violence* that we ignite ferocity when we define individuals solely by a single dimension of their personality or character. Intolerance, then, is not merely a burden on the weak; it is a poison that consume the lives of all.

Excellencies and Esteemed Guests,

A judge is entrusted to deliver justice from courtroom by upholding dignity and equal rights. The greater trust, however, is placed upon our faith leaders. It is to them people turn in search of spiritual knowledge and moral guidance. With their sacred words, they can inculcate a deeper respect for human dignity and a sincere commitment to equal rights. By teaching humility, they can guide people away from the traps of exclusion toward the spirit of solidarity.

Before I conclude, I wish to make an earnest appeal for more such gatherings. It is my conviction that interfaith dialogue is not a matter of choice, it is an imperative. In a world of constant interaction, we must choose: either dialogue or division, either conflict or coexistence. Together, we can commit ourselves to dialogue, not only in this room, not only between mosque and church, between temple and synagogue, but in every place where human beings meet. Since we all spring from a common origin, we must strive for a common peace. As poet Abu Barzak beautifully said "*Just as infinite colors blossom from a single sun – call it an atom or an Adam – everything was once One.*" Our efforts today must bring us closer to that one purpose, where unity is not a distant dream but a living reality.

Thank you.