

Malaysia, Vatican Establish Diplomatic Ties
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ROME -- Malaysia and the Vatican have agreed to establish formal diplomatic relations to promote bonds of mutual friendship and strengthen cooperation between both sides.

The announcement came following an audience between Malaysian Prime Minister Najib Tun Razak and Pope Benedict XVI at the papal summer residence in scenic Castel Gandolfo, outside Rome.

Saying that the world "is at a crossroads," Najib said Malaysia was keen to share its experience with the world, and that was why Malaysia was committed to forging links and alliances with like-minded countries to promote world peace and harmony.

"This is the main reason why Malaysia established diplomatic relations with the Holy See.

"The world is at a crossroads, the forces of irrationality and discord are threatening our long-cherish and hard-gained stability, and prosperity," Najib said in a statement issued after the meeting.

He said Malaysia and the Vatican were committed to surmounting negative forces which used religion to justify acts of terrorism, by employing the powers of reason and moderation.

He added that the Holy See recognised Malaysia's commitment to promote moderation as a global doctrine.

"Our effort in managing our diversity despite various hurdles and challenges is a cogent reminder that diverse societies can succeed.

"However, we must remain vigilant and confront pernicious forces that threaten to unravel this harmony. We must also do more by adopting an inclusive approach to administration and governance, and ensuring the Malaysian sun shines on every Malaysian," he said.

The establishment of Malaysia-Vatican ties follows the footsteps of other Muslim-majority nations such as Indonesia, Iran, Iraq, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Jordan, Turkey, Egypt, Libya, the Arab League and a majority of members of the Organisation of the Islamic Cooperation (OIC).

Najib, who brought along with him a multi-faith entourage in the meeting with the Pope, put forth his concept for a Global Movement of Moderates to counter extremism of all forms, a call he first made when delivering his speech to the United Nations General Assembly in September 2010 in New York.

As a multi-ethnic and multi-religious country, the prime minister said, Malaysia had drawn on the values of moderation to ensure continued harmony, stability and prosperity.

Najib also raised the possibility of forging closer links with the Pontifical Council for Inter-religious Dialogue headed by Cardinal Jean-Louis Tauran and the Pontifical Institute of Arab and Islamic Studies.

He said the Institute of Islamic Understanding, Institute of Advanced Islamic Studies and the Department of National Unity and Integration would spearhead this initiative from Malaysia.

Najib's delegation comprised Ministers in the Prime Minister's Department Dr Koh Tsu Koon and Jamil Khir Baharom, and Plantation Industries and Commodities Minister Bernard Dompok.

They were joined by National Fatwa Council chairman Prof Dr Abdul Shukor Husin and Archbishop Murphy Nicholas Xavier Pakiam.

The prime minister's wife, Datin Seri Rosmah Mansor, accompanied her husband on the trip. It was the second meeting between a Malaysian Prime Minister and the Pope, after the one involving Dr Mahathir Mohamad and Pope John Paul in June 2002.

The Holy See, as the supreme body of government of the Catholic Church, is a sovereign juridical entity under international law.

As the "central government" of the Catholic Church, the Holy See has a legal status that

allows it to enter into treaties as the juridical equal of a state and to send and receive diplomatic representatives.

The Holy See has formal diplomatic relations with more than 170 nations, including the United States and some predominantly Muslim countries.

Created in 1929 to provide a territorial identity for the Holy See in Rome, the 0.44 sq km Vatican City State is a recognised national territory under international law.

The Vatican has its own post office, commissary, bank, helicopter airfield and electrical generating plant and issues its own coins and stamps and has its own Internet domain (.va).

The Catholic community in Malaysia makes up the largest group of Christians in the country. About nine per cent of Malaysia's 28 million people are Christian, with Catholics numbering about 850,000.

(Bernama)

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