

Vatican official urges Hindus, Christians to promote religious freedom

Carol Glatz Catholic News Service | Oct. 20, 2011

VATICAN CITY -- In a message to the world's Hindus, a top Vatican official called on Christians and Hindus to work together in promoting religious freedom.

The lack of religious freedom is "taking center 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," wrote Cardinal Jean-Louis Tauran, president of the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue.

The freedom to "profess, practice and propagate" one's religious belief "is the answer to religiously motivated conflicts in many parts of the world," especially as so many people desperately seek full human development and peaceful coexistence with others, he wrote.

His comments came in an annual message to mark the Hindu celebration of Diwali, a three-day religious festival that was to begin Oct. 26 in most parts of the world.

The cardinal's letter, released by the Vatican Oct. 20, said when religious freedom is hampered or denied "all other human rights are endangered."

The freedom to worship in public or in private "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," the message said.

Hinduism is the third largest religion with more than 1 billion followers, the majority of whom live in India. In recent years, minority Catholic communities in India have faced increasing episodes of violence carried out by Hindu militants and have seen the passage of anti-conversion laws in some states.

The cardinal's message said true religious freedom benefits all of society because when believers are free from intimidation and prejudice, they are more willing to cooperate with others in building a just community.

Hindus and Christians can work together for the common good, especially by defending life, protecting the family and fostering education, honesty and the protection of resources, it said.

The cardinal's message also highlighted Pope Benedict XVI's upcoming pilgrimage to Assisi with religious leaders from around the world to renew a pledge to make religions a path to peace.

Cardinal Tauran said, "We will be spiritually united with them, confident that believers will always be a blessing for the whole world."

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