NATIONAL CATHOLIC REPORTER
Published on *National Catholic Reporter* (http://ncronline.org)

Francis: 'Persecution of anyone threatens us all'

NCR Staff | Oct. 24, 2013 The Francis Chronicles

"Wherever any minority is persecuted and marginalized because of its religious convictions or ethnic identity the well-being of society as a whole is endangered and each one of us must feel affected."

In a meeting with a delegation from an international Jewish human rights organization on Thursday, Pope Francis stressed that the problem of intolerance must be confronted, Vatican Radio reported [1].

According to Vatican Radio:

Several representatives from the U.S.-based Simon Wiesenthal Center met with Francis at the Vatican. He acknowledged the mission of the center, which is to fight every form of racism, intolerance and anti-Semitism, to preserve the memory of the Shoah and to promote mutual understanding between cultures.

Francis remarked that he has had several occasions in the past few weeks to restate "the Church's condemnation of all forms of anti-Semitism."

He added that he wanted to emphasize that "the problem of intolerance must be confronted in all its forms".

He made reference "with particular sadness" to the "suffering, marginalization and very real persecutions, which not a few Christians are undergoing in various countries".

He called on everyone to combine their efforts in favor of "a culture of encounter, respect, understanding and mutual forgiveness", and underlined that education is of particular importance in the creation of such a culture.

He said this education should not only focus on the transmission of facts but on "the handing on of a living witness", which presupposes "the establishment of a communion of life" and "a covenant with the coming generations, which is always open to truth".

He said young people must not only be conveyed a knowledge of the history of Jewish-Christian dialogue, its challenges and progress, but above all a passion for encounter and for coming to know the other, promoting active and responsible participation of the young.

And it is here that a shared commitment to the service of society and to the weakest holds great importance, he added.

He concluded by encouraging the Center to transmit to young people "the importance of working together to reject walls and to build bridges" between the two cultures and faith traditions.

Below is the official translation of the Pope's original Italian text:

Dear Friends,

I welcome this Delegation from the Simon Wiesenthal Center, an international Jewish organization for the defense of human rights. I am aware that this meeting had been planned some time ago by my predecessor Benedict XVI, whom you asked to visit and who remains in our affectionate thoughts and prayers.

These meetings are a concrete sign of the respect and esteem which you have for the Bishops of Rome, for which I am grateful. They are likewise an expression of the appreciation of the Pope for the task to which you have dedicated yourselves: to combat every form of racism, intolerance and anti-Semitism, to keep alive the memory of the Shoah, and to promote mutual understanding through education and commitment to the good of society.

In these last few weeks, I have reaffirmed on more than one occasion the Church's condemnation of all forms of anti-Semitism. Today I wish to emphasize that the problem of intolerance must be confronted in all its forms: wherever any minority is persecuted and marginalized because of its religious convictions or ethnic identity, the wellbeing of society as a whole is endangered and each one of us must feel affected. With particular sadness I think of the sufferings, the marginalization and the very real persecutions which not a few Christians are undergoing in various countries. Let us combine our efforts in promoting a culture of encounter, respect, understanding and mutual forgiveness.

For the building of such a culture, I would like to highlight especially the importance of education, not only as the transmission of facts, but as the handing on of a living witness. This presupposes the establishment of a communion of life, a covenant with the coming generations, which is always open to truth. To the young, we must be able to convey not only a knowledge of the history of Jewish-Catholic dialogue about past difficulties, but also an awareness of the progress made in recent decades. Above all we must be able to transmit a passion for meeting and coming to know others, promoting an active and responsible involvement of our young people. It is here that commitment to the service of society and to those most in need acquires a special value. I encourage you to continue to pass on to the young the importance of working together to reject walls and build bridges between our cultures and our faith traditions. May we go forward with trust, courage and hope! *Shalom!*

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[1] http://en.radiovaticana.va/news/2013/10/24/pope_meets_with_jewish_human_rights_group/en1-740239