

Pope receives Rouhani: Iran has important role to play in Middle East and in fight against terrorism

“Political solutions to the problems afflicting the Middle East” must be sought “together with other countries in the region”. The private meeting between the Pope and Iranian president, Hassan Rouhani, lasted 40 minutes. “I am hopeful for peace,” the Pope said



Pope Francis during his meeting with President Rouhani.

IACOPO SCARAMUZZI, VATICAN INSIDER, 26 JANUARY 2016

The Pope and the President of the Islamic Republic of Iran recalled “the conclusion and implementation of the Iran Nuclear Agreement” and “highlighted the important role Iran is called to play along with other countries in the Region, in promoting adequate political solutions to the problems afflicting the Middle East, preventing the spread of terrorism and arms trafficking”. This is what was said in a communiqué published at the end of Pope Francis’ audience with Iranian President Hassan Rouhani today.

During the talks which the Vatican described as “cordial”, the Pope and the Iranian president “highlighted their common spiritual values and reference was then made to the good state of relations between the Holy See and the Islamic Republic of Iran, Church life in the country and the Holy See’s actions in promoting the dignity of the human person and religious freedom. “Focus was given to the conclusion and implementation of the Iran Nuclear Agreement, with an emphasis on the important role Iran is called to play along with other countries in the Region, in promoting adequate political solutions to the problems afflicting the Middle East, preventing the spread of terrorism and arms trafficking. In relation to this, parties recalled the importance of interreligious dialogue and the responsibility religious communities have to foster reconciliation, tolerance and peace”. After the papal audience, Rouhani met the Vatican Secretary of State Cardinal Pietro Parolin, who was accompanied by the Secretary for Relations with States, Mgr. Paul Gallagher.

The private meeting between Hassan Rouhani and the Pope lasted 40 minutes. The Iranian president arrived a minute or so late – after 11 am – wearing a white turban and with a 20-car-long motorcade. Stringent security measures were in place along Via della Conciliazione and St. Peter’s Square. Rouhani was accompanied by a 12-member delegation, including Iran’s Minister of Foreign Affairs Mohammad Javad Zarif and the ambassador to the Holy See, Mohammad Taher Rabbani. The closed-door meeting with the Pope was held in the presence of two interpreters, a priest and an interpreter who translated from Farsi into Italian

and was the only female member of the Iranian delegation. The Persian leader gave the Pope a handwoven rectangular carpet along with a large illustrated book of miniatures. The Pope in turn, gave Rouhani a St. Martin medal one of the two gifts traditionally presented to visiting heads of state (the other gift is a medal depicting the angel of peace), explaining that the image of the saint who removes his cape and gives it to a pauper, “ is a symbol of gratuitous fraternity”. The Pope also gave the Iranian president copies of the “*Laudato Si*” encyclical “on care for the environment”, one in Italian, one in English and since it was not available in Farsi, “please allow me to give you a version in Arabic”. As the two bid each other farewell, journalists reported that the Pope told Rouhani: “Thank you very much for this visit and I am hopeful for peace”. To which the Iranian president replied: “I ask you to pray for me, it was a real pleasure and I wish you well with your work”.