

# Stress laid on interfaith cooperation at Expo 2020 Dubai event to mark Human Fraternity Day

Sat, 2022-02-05 00:37

DUBAI: The Document for Human Fraternity was “a milestone on the path of interreligious dialogue,” Cardinal Miguel Angel Ayuso told Arab News on the sidelines of an event at Expo 2020 Dubai marking the International Day of Human Fraternity.

He was one of several faith leaders who gathered at the Expo’s Sustainability Pavilion on Friday to mark the third anniversary of the signing – by Pope Francis of the Catholic Church and Sheikh Ahmed El-Tayeb, grand imam of Al-Azhar – of the document in Abu Dhabi on Feb. 4, 2019.

The joint declaration called for peace among all peoples, while setting out a blueprint for a culture of dialogue and collaboration between all faiths.



Cardinal Miguel Angel Ayuso, the President of the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue Human Fraternity for the joint Initiatives and peaceful Coexistence. (Supplied)

“We are citizens of the world,” said Ayuso, from Spain, who is the president of the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue and a renowned historian of Islam.

“All believers of God must work together to counter the problems we are facing today. It is important to cultivate values and to maintain a

relationship with religion, whether it's in church, a mosque or a synagogue.”

To mark the anniversary, Pope Francis and Sheikh El-Tayeb sent video messages in which they called for continued interfaith understanding.

“Now is not a time for indifference,” Pope Francis said. “Either we are brothers and sisters or everything falls apart.”

Sheikh El-Tayeb said: “This celebration means a quest for a better world where the spirit of tolerance, fraternity, solidarity and collaboration prevails. It also indicates a hope for providing effective tools to face the crises and challenges of contemporary humanity.



It is three years since Pope Francis of the Catholic Church and Sheikh Ahmed El-Tayeb, Grand Imam of Al-Azhar, co-signed the document in Abu Dhabi on Feb. 4, 2019. (Supplied)

“We have embarked on this path in the hope for a new world that is free of wars and conflicts, where the fearful are reassured, the poor sustained, the vulnerable protected and justice administered.”

Opening the celebrations, Judge Mohammed Abdelsalam, secretary-general of the Higher Committee of Human Fraternity, emphasized the ways in which the Document for Human Fraternity has empowered people to fight prejudice and increase accountability, offering protection for “the haves and have-nots, the rich and the poor, and both genders.”

The Higher Committee of Human Fraternity was founded by authorities in the UAE to determine the recipients of the Zayed Award, which is awarded each year to people or organizations “who embody through their work this lifelong commitment to human fraternity.”

Last year's recipients were UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres and Latifa Ibn Ziaten, a Moroccan-French activist who has campaigned tirelessly against radicalization since losing her son in a terrorist attack 10 years ago.

Speaking during Friday's event in Dubai, Mohammed Al-Diwaini, Al-Azhar deputy director of the grand imam, said it is imperative to “drop any sicknesses” of hatred and discrimination in favor of religious tolerance.

“If we follow our religion in its right form and without misinterpretation, we would be living in the best condition possible,” he told attendees.



Cardinal Miguel Angel Ayuso, the President of the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue Human Fraternity for the joint Initiatives and peaceful Coexistence (L), Sheikh Nahyan Mubarak Al-Nahyan (C), the UAE’s Minister of Tolerance and Coexistence and Dr Muhammad Al-Duwaini Al-Azhar, the Deputy of the Grand Imam in Dubai, on February 4, 2022. (AFP)

The opening ceremony included a short video highlighting leaders who had served the cause of coexistence, including Mahatma Gandhi, Mother Teresa, Martin Luther King Jr. and Sheikh Zayed, who was the driving force behind the formation of the UAE and championed plurality throughout his life.

To mark the International Day of Human Fraternity, US President Joe Biden sent a letter to the Higher Committee calling for global solidarity to meet the challenges of the day.

“From the ongoing threat of the COVID-19 pandemic and the existential climate crisis to the rise of violence around the world, these challenges require global cooperation from people of all backgrounds, cultures, faiths and beliefs,” Biden wrote.

He added that these challenges “require us to speak with one another in open dialogue, to promote tolerance, inclusion and understanding. Above all, they require us to be open minded, cooperative and empathetic and to ensure that all people are treated with dignity and as full participants in society.”

Echoing these sentiments, Cardinal Ayuso said the pandemic has been a

challenge for people of all religious backgrounds, but added that faith has helped to guide communities through the crisis and would help them recover.

“In light of today’s pandemic that pushed people to lockdown, numbers of believers at houses of worship went down but I believe their faith grew stronger in their hearts,” he told Arab News.

“Some complain religion should not be active in society but religion is not a problem; rather it is a part of a solution.”



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Grand Imam of Al-Azhar in Vatican meeting to discuss Document on Human Fraternity  
Pope Francis and Grand Imam of Al-Azhar Ahmed Al-Tayeb receive trophies for Zayed Award for Human Fraternity

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# US grants sanctions relief to Iran as nuclear talks remain in balance

Sat, 2022-02-05 00:34

WASHINGTON D.C.: The Biden administration on Friday restored some sanctions relief to Iran's atomic program as talks aimed at salvaging the languishing 2015 nuclear deal enter a critical phase.

As US negotiators head back to Vienna for what could be a make-or-break session, Secretary of State Antony Blinken signed several sanctions waivers related to Iran's civilian nuclear activities. The move reverses the Trump administration's decision to rescind them.

The waivers are intended to entice Iran to return to compliance with the 2015 deal that it has been violating since former President Donald Trump withdrew from the agreement in 2018 and re-imposed US sanctions.

Iran says it is not respecting the terms of the deal because the US pulled out of it first. Iran has demanded the restoration of all sanctions relief it was promised under the deal to return to compliance.

Friday's move lifts the sanctions threat against foreign countries and companies from Russia, China and Europe that had been cooperating with non-military parts of Iran's nuclear program under the terms of the 2015 deal, known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action, or JCPOA.

The Trump administration had ended the so-called "civ-nuke" waivers in May 2020 as part of its "maximum pressure" campaign against Iran that began when Trump withdrew the US from the deal in 2018, complaining that it was the worst diplomatic agreement ever negotiated and gave Iran a pathway to developing the bomb.

As a presidential candidate, Joe Biden made a US return to the nuclear deal a priority, and his administration has pursued that goal but there has been little progress toward that end since he took office a year ago. Administration officials said the waivers were being restored to help push the Vienna negotiations forward.

"The waiver with respect to these activities is designed to facilitate discussions that would help to close a deal on a mutual return to full implementation of the JCPOA and lay the groundwork for Iran's return to performance of its JCPOA commitments," the State Department said in a notice to Congress that announced the move.

"It is also designed to serve U.S. nonproliferation and nuclear safety interests and constrain Iran's nuclear activities," the department said. "It is being issued as a matter of policy discretion with these objectives in mind, and not pursuant to a commitment or as part of a quid pro quo. We are focused on working with partners and allies to counter the full range of

threats that Iran poses.”

A copy of the State Department notice and the actual waivers signed by Blinken were obtained by The Associated Press.

The waivers permit foreign countries and companies to work on civilian projects at Iran’s Bushehr nuclear power station, its Arak heavy water plant and the Tehran Research Reactor. Former Secretary of State Mike Pompeo had revoked the waivers in May, 2020, accusing Iran of “nuclear extortion” for continuing and expanding work at the sites.

Critics of the nuclear deal who lobbied Trump to withdraw from it protested, arguing that even if the Biden administration wants to return to the 2015 deal it should at least demand some concessions from Iran before up front granting it sanctions relief.

“From a negotiating perspective, they look desperate: we’ll waive sanctions before we even have a deal, just say yes to anything!” said Rich Goldberg, a vocal deal opponent who is a senior adviser to the hawkish Foundation for Defense of Democracies.

One senior State Department official familiar with the waivers maintained that the move is not a “concession” to Iran and was being taken “in our vital national interest as well as the interest of the region and the world.” The official was not authorized to discuss the matter publicly and spoke on condition of anonymity.



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## [UK accused of neglecting Briton held in Yemen since 2017](#)

Author:

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Fri, 2022-02-04 23:17

LONDON: The family of a British man held since 2017 and allegedly tortured in Yemen on Friday accused the UK government of apathy about his fate.

Luke Symons, 29, was detained by Houthi militia in southwest Yemen along with his Yemeni wife on suspicion of espionage, which his family strongly denies. They say his arm was broken during one interrogation in a bid to force a confession, and that his physical and mental health has degenerated during solitary confinement in the Yemeni capital Sanaa.

His wife was released and has been able to visit him periodically in the prison, and is alarmed at his condition, according to Symons' grandfather Robert Cummings.

"Luke's going through hell. He's getting no medical attention, and we've been going backwards, not forward, with this (UK) government," Cummings told AFP by phone from the family's home in Cardiff.

"The government should ask the question, 'what do the Houthis want to get Luke released?'," he said, accusing the militia of holding his grandson as a "bargaining chip" for unspecified aims.

"But they just won't ask the question," Cummings said, alleging inaction both by the Foreign Office in London and by Saudi-based British diplomats responsible for Yemen.

Amnesty International, which this week launched a fresh appeal for UK intervention, demanded that Foreign Secretary Liz Truss meet the family.

"It's long overdue that the government properly engaged with his family and exerted sustained pressure on the Houthis to get him out of jail and back home to Cardiff," Amnesty's UK chief Sacha Deshmukh said.

Symons was arrested in April 2017, when Prime Minister Boris Johnson was foreign secretary, and has never been charged.

The detainee's MP in the Welsh capital, Kevin Brennan of the opposition Labour party, pressed his case to Johnson in parliament a month ago.

The prime minister replied that the case was “a very sad one.”

“I know that our staff in the (Foreign Office) work very, very hard to try to release people from the positions they find themselves in,” Johnson said.

“Luke Symons is no exception to that,” he said, promising Brennan a meeting with a Foreign Office minister.

But there has still been no meeting, according to the family and Amnesty. Britain says it has been regularly raising Symons’ plight with the Houthi leadership, and insists it has kept his family informed.

“We know this is a difficult time for Luke Symons and his family. Our staff have been working intensively to secure Luke’s release,” a Foreign Office spokesperson said after the latest appeals.



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Washington threatens Houthi terror militia with new sanctions

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# Arab League, OIC welcome Amnesty's report on Israel's 'apartheid' against Palestinians

Author:

Fri, 2022-02-04 02:02

LONDON: The Arab League on Thursday welcomed a report by human rights organization Amnesty International, which called for Israeli authorities to be "held accountable for committing the crime of apartheid against Palestinians."

Dr. Saeed Abu Ali, the Arab League's assistant secretary-general for Palestine and the Occupied Arab Territories, praised the report, and said it represents an important international legal document.

He added that it comes at an urgent and critical time, "in light of the war crimes and crimes against humanity that Palestine is being subjected to, the frequency of which has escalated dangerously during the past year compared to the previous year."

He was speaking during a press briefing in Cairo to shed light on the most prominent violations committed by Israeli authorities against the Palestinian people in the last year.

The Amnesty report, entitled "Israel's apartheid against Palestinians: a cruel system of domination and a crime against humanity," details how Israel enforces a system of oppression and domination against the Palestinian people wherever it has control over their rights, Amnesty said. The 278-page report was compiled over a period of four years.

Abu Ali called on the international community to follow up on the report's important findings, focus on accountability, and identify those responsible for violations and crimes committed daily against the Palestinian people. The Organization of Islamic Cooperation also issued a similar statement, welcoming the report and calling on the international community "to take the necessary measures to ensure accountability of Israel for its violations, crimes and racist policies against the Palestinian people."



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## [Palestine Liberation Organization to choose top negotiator after death of Erekat](#)

Fri, 2022-02-04 00:25

RAMALLAH, West Bank: The Palestine Liberation Organization meets on Sunday to elect key leadership figures tasked with keeping up the struggle for

statehood, at a gathering which may hint at a potential successor for President Mahmoud Abbas.

The most important post up for grabs is that of the late chief negotiator Saeb Erekat, who was PLO secretary-general and had been deeply involved for decades in the now moribund peace talks with Israel. He died in 2020 from coronavirus complications.

Once the undisputed champion of the Palestinian cause, the PLO has lost much of its relevance since the 1994 establishment of the Palestinian Authority.

PLO Chairman Abbas, who is also the PA president, is 86 years old and has seen support dive to historic lows in opinion polls, accused of autocracy in rare West Bank street protests last year.

Palestinians have not been to the ballot box for 16 years, and their aspirations for a two-state solution are strongly rejected by Israel's right-wing nationalist Prime Minister Naftali Bennett.

Violence flares almost daily in the occupied West Bank, and the coastal enclave of Gaza is still recovering from another devastating war with Israel last year.

Against this backdrop, the PLO meeting in Ramallah will seek to fill key posts in the movement that was founded in 1964 and bills itself as the sole representative of all Palestinians.

Also open is the position of high-profile official Hanan Ashrawi, who resigned more than a year ago from the 18-member executive committee, the PLO's top decision-making body.

Abbas confidante Hussein Al-Sheikh, the PA's civil affairs minister, is widely tipped to take over Erekat's seat and chief negotiator role.

He is also among those seen as Abbas's possible successors.

Other contenders are Prime Minister Mohammad Shtayyeh and Marwan Barghouti, who is currently in an Israeli prison over his role in planning attacks and whom supporters describe as the Palestinian Nelson Mandela.

"Sheikh is a person that Israelis seem to hold in high regard. Certainly the Americans do," said Khaled Elgindy, a senior fellow at the Middle East Institute.

"Others feel that he's the kind of guy that they can work with. So in the near term, it seems like it makes a lot of sense."

A veteran of Abbas's Fatah movement, Sheikh has cultivated ties with foreign diplomats and with Israel, and met with Foreign Minister Yair Lapid last month.

Bennett's coalition government has ruled out formal peace talks with the Palestinians but has said it wants to deepen economic cooperation with the PA

to improve livelihoods in the West Bank.

“It does look like Abu Mazen (Abbas) is sort of preparing the ground for a future succession process,” said Elgindy.

“I’m just not sure that the actual succession process is going to unfold according to his wishes.”



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