

Holy Land Visit: Speech to Jordanian Officials

Pope Francis

Arriving in the Holy Land for a three-day visit, Pope Francis made a call for religious freedom in the Middle East, including respect for the right to change one's religion. "Religious freedom is, in fact, a fundamental human right, and I cannot fail to express my hope that it will be upheld throughout the Middle East and the entire world," the pope said May 24 in a speech to local dignitaries shortly after his arrival in Amman, Jordan. The pope said Jordanian Christians, who make up less than 2 percent of the country's population, "are able to profess their faith peacefully in a climate of respect for religious freedom," and he thanked Jordan's

"I am grateful that Jordan has supported a number of important initiatives aimed at advancing interreligious dialogue and understanding between Jews, Christians and Muslims."

King Abdullah II and the country's Muslim community for their support of interreligious dialogue with Christians and Jews. Pope Francis also paid tribute to Jordan's "generous welcome" to Palestinian, Iraqi and Syrian refugees. An estimated 1.3 million Syrian and Iraqi refugees now live in Jordan, alongside a permanent population of 6.4 million. The pope addressed Jordanian authorities following a private meeting with King Abdullah in the royal palace. During his trip to the Holy Land, the pope met with Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew of Constantinople, the first among equals of Orthodox bishops; celebrated Masses in Amman, Jerusalem and Bethlehem, West Bank; met with the leaders of Israel and the Palestinian territories, the chief rabbis of Israel and the grand mufti of Jerusalem, and Palestinian refugees; and visited Christian, Jewish and Muslim holy sites. In his speech to Jordanian officials, Pope Francis spoke in Italian; a Vatican translation of his speech follows, copyright © 2014 by Libreria Editrice Vaticana.

I thank God for granting me this opportunity to visit the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan in the footsteps of my predecessors Paul VI, John Paul II and Benedict XVI.

I am grateful to His Majesty King Abdullah II for his warm words of welcome as I recall with pleasure our recent meeting in the Vatican. I also greet the members of the royal family, the government and the people of Jordan, this land so rich in history and with

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