



Media Release - April 18, 2007

Catholic Bishops invite Christians, Muslims and Jews to meet together and discuss *The Role of Religion in Achieving Peace in the Middle East*

The Australian Catholic Bishops Conference is bringing together key people from the Christian, Muslim and Jewish religious traditions for two groundbreaking events focusing on understanding and achieving Peace in the Middle East.

The first event is a day-long Congress to be held at NSW Parliament House on Wednesday, May 2.

Then, the following night, on Thursday, May 3, there will be a public event at Notre Dame University of Australia's Broadway campus, chaired by Her Excellency Professor Marie Bashir, the Governor of NSW.

Both the Parliament House Congress and the public event will be significant events in Australian Inter-religious affairs, during which participants will consider the topic: "*The Role of Religion in Achieving Peace in the Middle East*".

Speakers on both occasions will be Mr Mohommad Sammak, Archbishop Elias Chacour and Mr Jeremy Jones.

Mr Sammak is the Secretary-General of the Lebanese Christian-Muslim Committee for Dialogue and Secretary General of the Islamic Spiritual Council in Lebanon. Archbishop Chacour is the Melkite Catholic Archbishop of Akka, Haifa, Nazareth and all Galilee. Mr Jones is the Director of International and Community Affairs for Australia/Israel & Jewish Affairs Council.

The forums are an initiative of the Bishops Commission for Ecumenism and Inter-religious Relations and the Parliament House congress will be chaired by the Commission Chairman, Bishop Michael Putney.

The President of the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference, Archbishop Philip Wilson will give the official welcome at the Parliament House event, which will be attended by about 100 people representing the Christian, Jewish and Muslim religious traditions.

"The Australian Bishops initiated these events as means of gathering together leaders and experts from Christianity, Islam and Judaism to consider the complex question of The Role of Religion in Achieving Peace in the Middle East," Archbishop Wilson said.

"Obviously this is a huge question, but we are confident that in listening to the wisdom of each speaker we can make at least some small progress towards understanding, which is the first step towards progress."

The public forum on Thursday, May 3 will be held at St Benedict's Hall, The University of Notre Dame Australia, corner of Broadway and Abercrombie Street, Chippendale, from 6.30pm to 8pm. It is being hosted by the Equestrian Order of the Holy Sepulchre of Jerusalem and is being supported by Caritas Australia.

For more information contact Debra Vermeer at the ACBC on 02 6201 9859 or 0414 880 475. For information on the May 3 public event or to rsvp to it, contact khsmideastforum@hotmail.com or phone 02 9221 7675.