

In message to Muslims, cardinal touches on violence

VATICAN CITY - In a message to the Muslim world, a leading Vatican official denounced terrorism and all violence committed in the name of religion.

The message also took aim at religious discrimination, saying the rights of all believers must be protected during the “troubled times we are passing through.”

The text, released by the Vatican Sept. 28, marked the end of Ramadan, the Islamic month of prayer and fasting that concludes in mid-October. It was written by Cardinal Jean-Louis Tauran, who took over as head of the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue earlier this year.

Christians and Muslims, the cardinal said, need to intensify their dialogue so that younger generations “do not become cultural or religious blocs opposed to each other.”

Cardinal Tauran began and ended his message by expressing the church’s “warmest greetings” to the Islamic world. But the text touched on a number of sensitive issues, especially those of religious liberty, violence and terrorism.

All believers should do everything they can to “reject, denounce and refuse every recourse to violence, which can never be motivated by religion, since it wounds the very image of God in man,” the cardinal said.

“We know that violence, especially terrorism which strikes blindly and claims countless innocent victims, is incapable of resolving conflicts and leads only to a deadly chain of destructive hatred, to the detriment of mankind and of societies,” he said.

Cardinal Tauran said believers have a duty to work in favor of peace by showing respect for the convictions of individuals and communities everywhere. That is accomplished first of all by respecting the freedom of religious practice, which is more than freedom of worship, he said.

“As religious believers, it’s up to us all to be educators of peace, of human rights, of a freedom which respects each person” and to relate to others “without discrimination,” he said.

Cardinal Tauran did not name specific places or countries, but his message appeared aimed at predominantly Muslim countries that have enacted strict forms of Islamic law, often weakening the rights of the Christian minority.

He said it was important to intensify Christian-Muslim dialogue, which has an educational and cultural impact.

“Dialogue is the tool which can help us to escape from the endless spiral of conflict and multiple tensions which mark our societies, so that all peoples can live in serenity and peace and with mutual respect and harmony among their component groups,” he said.

The cardinal said he recognized that Ramadan was an important time for Muslims and gives them spiritual strength.

“It matters that all of us witness to our religious beliefs with a life increasingly integrated and in conformity with the creator’s plan, a life concerned with serving our brothers and sisters in ever increasing solidarity and fraternity with members of other religions and all men of good will, in the desire to work together for the common good,” he said.