

Vatican official gives Iranian leader letter from pope

VATICAN CITY - A top Vatican official met with Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad in Teheran and gave him a letter from Pope Benedict XVI, a Vatican spokesman said.

The letter was hand-delivered in Teheran Nov. 9 by Cardinal Jean-Louis Tauran, president of the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue, said Passionist Father Ciro Benedettini, vice-director of the Vatican press office Nov. 10.

Cardinal Tauran met personally with the Iranian leader while the Vatican official was participating in a three-day meeting regarding Muslim-Christian relations. The meeting, a joint initiative of the Vatican interreligious council and the Teheran-based Islamic Culture and Relations Organization, included leaders of the local Catholic church.

In October, an Iranian official delivered a letter from Ahmadinejad to Pope Benedict in which the president said he hoped to work closely with the Vatican to help stem religious intolerance, the break up of families and the increase of secularism and materialism.

On that occasion, the contents of the letter were released by Iranian news agencies.

Father Benedettini did not disclose the contents of the letter from Pope Benedict.