

### **Franciscans Among People of Other Faiths**

On October 18-21, 2017, an International Conference on Inter-Religious Dialogue (IRD) for Peaceful Coexistence in Intercultural Societies was held at *the Couvent Notre Dame du Puits, Bkenneya, Beirut, Lebanon*. Sixty-six participants attended the 4 days conference with the theme “Franciscans Among People of Other Faiths”. Majority of the participants were Capuchin friars from over 20 countries. They were joined by other Franciscans including OFM Conventuals, OFM, Franciscan sisters, and Secular Franciscans (OFS). The presence of Muslim participants from Kenya (representing the Damietta Peace Initiative) and Lebanon graced the conference. The conference began with the Holy Mass celebrated by Fr. Tanios, the Custos of Lebanon. In his homily, he welcomed all participants and reiterated the value and significance of IRD in our witness of God’s love to all people both Christians and non-Christians for peaceful coexistence.

The conference was divided into three interlocked sessions. The first part contextualized the involvement of friars in IRD. As such participants presented reports from their various countries including from Belgium, Canada, France, Germany, India, Indonesia, Italy, Kenya, Lebanon, Malaysia, Malta, Nigeria, Pakistan, Philippines, Poland, Saudi Arabia, Switzerland, Syria, Tanzania, Turkey, United Arab Emirates, and United States of America. This helped to enlighten participants on the work being done to promote IRD in different parts of the world. Fr. Silvestro Bajan OFMConv, General Delegate for Ecumenism and Interreligious Dialogue of the Order of the Friars Minor Conventuals in Assisi, presented on *IRD-Paradigms of Theological Interpretations*. His lecture gave a theological basis for IRD in the Church. Another enlightening perspective was given by Sheikh Ahmad Taleb who spoke on the *Muslim perspective of IRD*. This was complemented by Fr. Fadi Daou’s reflection on *IRD and Evangelization*. The first part was nicely concluded by Fr. Varghese Manimala OFMCap who engaged participants on the topic- *IRD in a post-secular world*.

The second part of the conference was oriented into addressing contemporary issues on IRD. In this case, Dr. Paschal Robert OFM guided the participants to reflect on *IRD and peacebuilding, religious fundamentalism and fanaticism*. The lecture was of much interest to the participants. Sr. Lilian Curaming FMM, highly experienced in IRD, reminded participants of their Franciscans roots in IRD, her presentation was titled “*Franciscans Dialogue among Muslims and people of other faiths*”. At the end of the second session, Dr. Mohamed El-Sammak greatly inspired participants on the topic *understanding Islam and relating with Muslims*. His extensive knowledge of both Islam and Christianity was greatly appreciated and enlightened participants on theology and practices of both faiths.

The final part of the conference helped participants to plan for future engagement in the ministry of IRD in the order and beyond. In this case, drawing from knowledge and experience acquired during the seminar, participants were able to draw up conclusions and make proposals and recommendations for the future. With the help of the reduction committee of six people, an IRD peace statement was released by the participants. In addition, suggestions were put forth for the creation of guidelines on IRD for Capuchin friars around the world. The conference finished with the symbolic act of the signing of IRD peace statement and presentation of certificates of attendance to the participants. The Bishop of Beirut, a Muslim representative, and Br. Pistorius OFMCap (who represented the Minister General OFMCap), witnessed this process of commitment by the participants. The conference was brought a conclusion by the celebration of Holy Mass presided over by most reverend Cèsar Essayan OFMConv, vicar apostolic of Beirut. Below find the final document from the meeting:

*Br. Benedict Ayodi, OFMCap*