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Multi-religious Cooperation a Vital Key to Peace in Syria: *Religions for Peace* Delegation meets with the President of the National Syrian Coalition.

(Cairo, Egypt | 31 December 2012) His Excellency Ahmed Mouaz Al Khatib, President of the National Coalition of Syrian Revolution and Opposition Forces, received the *Religions for Peace (RfP)* delegation and stated: “Today, all Syrians are in anguish and the most innocent are the most vulnerable.” He added: “Multi-religious cooperation in Syria is a central key to peace and reconciliation.” “Syria is for all Syrians,” he noted. “Syria is a garden of diversity and it is respect for—even joy over—this diversity that defines Syria. Each religious community is called to protect and assist the members of all other communities. The new Syria must protect all its citizens and its legacy of religious diversity.”

His Eminence Dr. Mustafa Ceric, the immediate past Grand Mufti of Bosnia-Herzegovina and an International Co-President of *RfP*, and Dr. William Vendley, Secretary General of *RfP*, co-led the delegation to meet President Khatib on 31 December 2012. Dr. Mohamed Elsanousi, a senior representative of the Islamic Society of North America (ISNA), represented the *RfP*—ISNA partnership in the delegation. “The partnership with ISNA has been invaluable,” noted Dr. Vendley.

Dr. Ceric shared with President Khatib the irreplaceable role of multi-religious cooperation in Bosnia-Herzegovina, stating that “*RfP* provided vital

solidarity and support to Bosnia’s religious leaders in their hour of greatest need.” Similar *RfP* efforts, he noted, have taken place in over 24 states suffering from violent conflict. “Only Syrian religious leaders can lead a Syrian multi-religious council,” he noted. “Religious leaders around the world are in solidarity with all Syrians and their religious leaders. They are prepared to work through *RfP* to support the building and equipping of a Syrian-led national inter-religious council.”

Dr. Vendley shared with President Khatib that *RfP* was a civil society, strictly non-partisan organization that wanted to be of service to all Syrian religious communities and their respective leaders. He shared further that “*RfP* is open to engage in principled partnerships with governments, but utterly deplors and strongly condemns the brutal violence being inflicted on the Syrian people by their own military.” “Resistance fighters, too,” he added, “must place the safety of non-combatants as their first priority.”

Dr. Mohamed Elsanousi shared the delegation’s desire to establish a working partnership with the Syrian Coalition that would focus upon building a Syrian multi-religious council equipped to provide humanitarian assistance, prevent sectarian conflict, advocate shared principles for good governance and help to lead a process national reconciliation.

President Khatib affirmed the importance of this agenda and the irreplaceable role of Syrian religious leaders in advancing it. He also stated that “the engagement of the younger generation and women is vital for the peace and development of Syria.”

Both President Khatib and the *RfP* delegation pledged to take steps to advance cooperation on these shared concerns.

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