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Intersections International Gathers US Religious Leaders to Meet with Counterparts in Pakistan

NEW YORK, NY – April 17, 2013 – As Pakistan gears up for next month’s parliamentary elections, a multi-faith delegation of US religious leaders is meeting this week with their counterparts in Islamabad and Lahore. This first-of-its-kind gathering is part of a larger effort across various sectors in civil society that seeks to build relationships, alter stereotypes and develop an action agenda to promote mutual respect and understanding between both countries.

The 14-member delegation is organized by Intersections International, a New York City-based non-governmental organization, in partnership with two prestigious universities in Pakistan — the Lahore University of Management Sciences and the International Islamic University in Islamabad.

Rev. Robert Chase, founding director of Intersections and principal organizer of this effort, says “there are so many misperceptions on both sides about our respective countries. Interpersonal engagement is the best way to change the narrative of fear and mistrust that so dominates the relationship between us.”

The delegation represents the pluralistic mosaic in the US: it includes Muslims, Christians and Jews, men and women, diverse ethnicities and a variety of faith perspectives. The effort is sponsored solely by private sources.

“While both governments are aware that we are meeting,” Chase said, “the fact that we have no governmental support from either country, and that we are in partnership with two esteemed Pakistani institutions, gives us great credibility on the ground. Our very presence indicates to Pakistanis that there are Americans of many faith traditions who are concerned about the things that make for peace.”

This effort is part of a wider undertaking called the US-Pakistani Leaders Forum, a multi-year project in which persons of influence from several civic sectors — education, agriculture, entrepreneurship, media and culture — in both countries gather to build bi-lateral working agreements that will ultimately lead to policy decisions that make for a more stable relationship between our two countries.

“Few countries personify the search for an Islamic identity as does Pakistan - as well as embodying a great tradition of interreligious and cultural diversity,” says Melody Fox Ahmed, Assistant Director for Programs and Operations at Georgetown University’s Berkley Center for Religion, Peace, and World Affairs and one of the US representatives. “As an American Muslim, I am excited about engaging with and learning from Pakistanis about these great traditions and building bridges through this extraordinary interreligious delegation.”

About Intersections International
Intersections International is a New York City-based non-governmental organization dedicated to building respectful relationships among diverse individuals and communities in an effort to forge common ground. We develop and put into practice innovative strategies that promote justice, reconciliation and peace. Founded in 2007, Intersections is a multi-cultural, multi-faith permanent initiative of the Collegiate Churches of New York, the oldest corporation in North America, dating back to 1628.

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