Abrahamic Family House, a new centre for learning and dialogue in Abu Dhabi, hosts first conference on peaceful coexistence

- Nahyan bin Mubarak Al Nahyan and Cardinal Michael Fitzgerald attended first conference, exploring notions of interfaith dialogue and peaceful coexistence
- Rooted in the UAE’s values of bringing people and cultures together, the Abrahamic Family House was inspired by the principles of the Document on Human Fraternity
- The centre encompasses a mosque, a church, and a synagogue where worshippers are welcome to practice their respective faiths

Abu Dhabi, UAE, 21 February 2023: The Abrahamic Family House, a new centre for learning, dialogue and the practice of faith, was inaugurated 16 February 2023. Located in the Saadiyat Cultural District in Abu Dhabi, the site encompasses three distinct houses of worship – His Eminence Ahmed El-Tayeb Mosque, His Holiness Francis Church, and the Moses Ben Maimon Synagogue – as well as a forum for gathering and dialogue.

On Friday 17 February, the first interfaith conference focused on mutual understanding and peaceful coexistence. The panel discussions brought together leading historians, religious figures, and scholars from across the world, exploring notions of interfaith dialogue, coexistence and understanding.

His Excellency Sheikh Nahyan Mubarak Al Nahyan, Minister of Tolerance and Coexistence delivered the first keynote address, highlighting how the Abrahamic Family House’s first gathering, through its diverse speakers, embodied the United Arab Emirate’s values of mutual understanding and peaceful coexistence: “By establishing the Abrahamic Family House, here in Abu Dhabi, with the strong support of the leaders and the people of the United Arab Emirates, we hope to work together to enhance our ability to share our values of mutual respect and peaceful coexistence with the entire world.”

The first panel involved a discussion about the significant accomplishments made since the signing of the Document on Human Fraternity by His Holiness Pope Francis, head of the Catholic Church, and Grand Imam of Al-Azhar, His Eminence Grand Imam Dr. Ahmed Al-Tayeb, in 2019. The panellists included His Eminence Cardinal Miguel Ángel Ayuso Guixot, Chief Rabbi Yehuda Sarna, and His Eminence Professor Mohammed Al Mahrasawi. H.E Judge Mohammed Abdelsalam, the Secretary-General of the Higher Committee on Human Fraternity, moderated the session.

In the second keynote address, His Eminence Cardinal Michael Fitzgerald, President Emeritus of the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue said: “It is the hope and intention of His Holiness the Pope, the Grand Imam of Al-Azhar Ahmed Al-Tayeb, and the leaders of this beloved nation, that the
Document on Human Fraternity be known to all. The Abrahamic Family House realises that hope and is an incarnation of the spirit of the Document.*

The second panel, moderated by Professor Mariët Westermann, Vice-Chancellor of New York University Abu Dhabi, highlighted the importance of intercultural dialogue and understanding in the promotion of peace and tolerance. The two panellists, H.E. Zaki Anwar Nusseibeh, cultural advisor to the president of the United Arab Emirates, and Chief Rabbi David Rosen, International Director of Interreligious Affairs for the American Jewish Congress, shared their thoughts on the impact of cultural diplomacy.

The final panel focussed on empowering youth through intercultural dialogue with May Al Hajeri, the former UAE Youth Delegate to the United Nations, Samuel Sievers, Yazan Shehada, and Matthew Ayoub, the three founders of the Youth Tolerance Association.

The closing address was made by H.E. Ambassador Huda Nonoo, who is the first female Ambassador from the Kingdom of Bahrain and the first Jewish Ambassador of an Arab country in Washington D.C., USA.

On the occasion of the inauguration, on 16 February, H.E. Mohamed Khalifa Al Mubarak, President of the Abrahamic Family House, said: "The Abrahamic Family House is symbolic of the UAE’s longstanding values of mutual respect and peace coexistence – values embodied by our Founding Father, the late Sheikh Zayed. The centre will be a platform for learning and dialogue, a model of coexistence set against the backdrop of the multiculturalism and diversity of our nation, where more than 200 nationalities live peacefully side-by-side. We hope that the Abrahamic Family House will inspire youth everywhere, as we highlight our common humanity and work towards the creation of a more peaceful world for generations to come."

The three houses of worship are of equal stature and external dimensions, and have been designed by Sir David Adjaye, of Adjaye Associates, to respect the architectural codes and individualism of each faith. Each takes the form of a cube that is thirty metres deep, thirty metres wide, and thirty metres tall. They are separated by a raised garden and outdoor space.

Sir David Adjaye, architect of Abrahamic Family House, commented: "I believe architecture should work to enshrine the kind of world we want to live in, a world of tolerance, openness, and constant advancement. As an architect I want to create something that enhances the richness of human life. Our hope is that through these buildings, people of all faiths and from across society can learn and engage in a mission of peaceful coexistence for generations to come."

Attending the inauguration, His Eminence Professor Mohammed Al Mahrasawi, Co-chair of Higher Committee for Human Fraternity, and former President of Al-Azhar University said: "The Abrahamic Family House is a true reflection of the provisions of the Document on Human Fraternity, which calls for ensuring peaceful coexistence. It is a testament to the vision of the United Arab Emirates and its leaders..."
towards promoting interfaith dialogue and peace among all. The Abrahamic Family House is a model of coexistence, reconciliation, and mutual respect for the sake of mankind.”

Cardinal Miguel Ángel Ayuso Guixot, President of The Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue of The Holy See said: “The Abrahamic Family House is a concrete example for people of different religions, cultures, traditions, and beliefs to return to the essential: love of neighbour. This will be a place which promotes dialogue and mutual respect, and acts in the service of human fraternity as we walk the paths of peace together.”

Sir Ephraim Mirvis, Chief Rabbi of the United Hebrew Congregations of the Commonwealth said: “On this historic day, we have gathered to celebrate this remarkable monument to loving kindness – the Abrahamic Family House. From today onwards, let us use this extraordinary and sacred site to promote harmony and peace. In a world in which differences can separate us, let us say here that our shared values shall exist for the sake of our universal aspirations.”

Rooted in the UAE’s values of bringing people and cultures together, the Abrahamic Family House embodies the diversity of Abu Dhabi and the wider UAE, home to vibrant multicultural communities of various faiths. The project was inspired by the principles in the Document on Human Fraternity, signed by His Holiness Pope Francis and His Eminence Grand Imam Dr. Ahmed El-Tayeb in Abu Dhabi in 2019.

The Abrahamic Family House now welcomes all worshippers to practice their respective faiths at the mosque, the church, and the synagogue. The centre will welcome all visitors to the forum and for guided tours starting from 1 March 2023. For operating hours and information on guided tours and bookings, visit the website.

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About the Abrahamic Family House

Rooted in the UAE’s vision of bringing people and cultures together, the Abrahamic Family House is dedicated to fostering peaceful coexistence for generations to come. Encompassing a church, a mosque, a synagogue, and a Forum to learn and nurture mutual understanding, the Abrahamic Family House welcomes people from all walks of life to exchange knowledge and practice faith. Inspired by the principles in the Document of Human Fraternity and the values of the UAE, the Abrahamic Family House embraces diverse beliefs, founded on common humanity, coming together in peace.

Notes to editors:

Islam is both the official and the majority religion in the UAE, with approximately 76% of the population practising.

Abu Dhabi is home to diverse and vibrant Christian communities, from a range of denominations, the largest being Roman Catholic. His Holiness Francis Church at the Abrahamic Family House, though open to all denominations, is formally a Catholic church, administered by the Vatican in Rome.

Abu Dhabi is home to a small but flourishing Jewish community, established by expatriates and students. The wider region has been the historic home to significant Jewish communities, such as in Iraq and Yemen.

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