

Rome, 04 February 2006

Dear Imam Kuftaro and friend,

The publication in Europe of images that offend the Prophet Mohammed and Islam, distributed to the public in form of cartoons by a small group of laic extremists induces me to tell you my consternation and to testify you my profound sympathy as well as my sincere friendship which I extend to the Muslim community in Syria.

In January 2004 you had invited me to speak at the Mosque Abou Nour in Damascus, a Friday morning when your father Gran Mufti of Syria, Sheikh Ahmad Kuftaro presided the celebration of prayers. This was a very emotional moment for me as a catholic priest to be able to address the Muslim community with a fraternal message of peace, for the dialogue between two religions and the exchange of solidarity between our two cultures.

The publication of these cartoons by a certain European media testifies the mediocrity of their authors. When someone looks out for scandals, insult, defamation and denigration to offend his next because of his religion, he only shows his insufficiency and the low level of culture. Saint Thomas d'Aquin said *"The denigration is the passion of insufficiency"*

The irresponsible authors of these cartoons don't only show their ignorance, but justify it by confirming that this is a way or attitude of *liberty*. They make themselves ridiculous. The real liberty is respect of religious convictions towards others and the liberty does not give the right to irresponsibility, indifference and ignorance. The hate against the ones who practice a religion makes them blind about the consequences that such acts can provoke. They also do not recognize the Chart of the United Nations and the Declaration of Human Rights on religion and religious convictions.

Those who speak of liberty of the press do not open their mouth to denounce the fact that numerous journalists in the United States have been fired (even put into prison) because they told the truth of what is happening in Iraq.

I am very sad about these events and renew, dear friend, my most fraternal greetings to you.

Father Jean-Marie Benjamin

**H.E. Imam Salah Kuftaro**  
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