

Pope, Muslim leaders to meet in Rome

by UPI

VATICAN CITY - Pope Benedict XVI is to meet with Islamic leaders in Rome in November to foster better relations between Roman Catholics and Muslims, Vatican officials said. Talks between Muslim and Vatican representatives were held this week to pave the way for a fall seminar to be attended by two dozen leaders and scholars from both sides, with the goal of improving dialogue and finding common ground between the religions, the Voice of America reported Wednesday. Professor Aref Ali Nayef, director of the Royal Islamic Strategic Studies Center in Jordan, told VOA the preparatory sessions were "quite positive and welcoming." "Furthermore, by the end of the meetings we emerged with a permanent structure that will ensure that the Catholic-Muslim engagement and dialogue continues into the future to work out issues and to work out an exchange of opinions about important matters," Nayef said. A Catholic-Muslim forum will meet every two years, alternating between Rome and a Muslim country, he said. Catholic-Muslim relations were set back in 2006 when Pope Benedict gave a lecture in Germany that many Muslims interpreted as implying Islam is violent and irrational, VOA reported. While the pope expressed regret at the reaction, resentment lingers among some Muslims, Nayef said.

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