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Let me start, however, by picking up something that Fr Borrmans has already mentioned in describing the transfer of the institute from Tunisia to Rome. He noticed that this transfer brought about an “enlargement of scale”, the concern being the training of personnel for Christian-Muslim relations not only in North Africa, or in the Continent of Africa as a whole, but in Asia and in Europe, and in fact in any part of the world where Christians and Muslims meet.

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*The variety of Islam*

The global perspective, which is the PISAI’s context today, means that attention has to be given to the variety of ways in which Islam is lived, from Mauritania to Mindanao, from Samarkand to Sydney. Of course the constants are many, but the differences, determined by cultural factors, are significant. It has been, and will be, impossible for PISAI to deal in depth with each local form of Islam, though series of lectures have been given, and presumably will continue to be given, on Islam in Africa, or Islam in Asia. It may well be necessary to add lectures on Islam in the Western world, whether it be in Europe, in North America or in Australia. The situation of what were and remain to some extent immigrant communities, but which transform into settled communities, is constantly changing and needs to be monitored. Incidentally, one hope for the future is that the Churches in the West, the Catholic Church but also other Churches and communities, might take the challenge of Islam more seriously, and would have people trained to encourage and guide Christian-Muslim relations at the local level. PISAI has welcomed such students and would willingly receive more.

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As I have said, PISAI cannot hope to cover all local situations. It would seem to me that its role has to be to focus on forming people who will then be able to give formation at the local level. We shall be hearing later on in this conference from people who are doing just this, whether in a Christian or in a Muslim environment. Within the solid formation that is given, the teaching of Arabic remains significant, for not only is Arabic the sacral language of Islam but it has also influenced the languages of all cultures that have been marked by Islam. Moreover, Muslim religious leaders and scholars, wherever they are, tend to refer to the same sources. I would not therefore wish PISAI to renounce the teaching of Arabic. On the contrary, I think the training in Arabic of future formators will provide them with firmer grounding.

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*Contact with Islamic Institutions*

It would seem to me important for the PISAI as such, and for individual staff members of PISAI, to continue to be in contact with Islamic Institutions throughout the world, and indeed to increase and multiply these contacts. Contact with Muslim Institutions where special attention is given to Christianity would be particularly useful. Exchanges of lecturers might be facilitated. Academic conferences involving different institutions can be helpful in allowing increased cooperation to develop.

The PISAI is pleased and honoured, I am sure, when its staff members are invited to take part in formal dialogue meetings. The experience and the practice of dialogue need always to be renewed. I would be inclined to say that this dialogue should not be restricted to the bilateral dimension, Christian-Muslim dialogue. Participation in dialogues where people of a number of religions are brought together can be truly instructive and inspiring. It is perhaps through such meetings that a climate of peaceful cooperation can be created.

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There are so many expectations of the Pontifical Institute for Arabic and Islamic Institute, which is after all the only Pontifical Institute specifically dedicated to the formation for Christian-Muslim relations. It is obvious that it will not be possible to fulfil them all, or at least not all of them to the same degree. Something else also becomes immediately clear. In order to correspond to these expectations, the PISAI will need all the support that it can get. After fifty years it is well established in Rome, within the circle of Pontifical Institutes where there is a growing spirit of cooperation. It has benefitted from the assistance given by the Congregation for Catholic Education, from the interest shown by the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue and other dicasteries of the Roman Curia. It has enjoyed the friendship and collaboration of the embassies to the Holy See of different countries. I am confident that this support will continue, allowing the PISAI to rise to the challenges presented by the world today and to maintain its valid contribution to the world of Christian-Muslim relations, for the next fifty years and beyond.