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Otri receives Duchess, Duke of Calabria

DAMASCUS, (SANA) – Prime Minister Mohammad Naji Otri yesterday received Prince Carlo Bourbon Duke of Calabria and Princess Camilla Bourbon of Calabria and the accompanying delegation.

Talks, during the meeting, dealt with cooperation with the Vatican and the impact of the visit of the Pope John the 2nd regarding the promotion of these relations.

The Talks also dealt with Syria's position as a center of civilization and heavenly religions and the Syrian society's tolerance, fraternity and co-existence between all religions and groups.

President receives Duke of Calabria

DAMASCUS, (SANA) – President Bashar al-Assad received yesterday morning at al-Shaab (people) Palace His Royal Highness Prince Carlo of Bourbon Two Sicilies, Duke of Calabria, the Grand Master and the Grand Prefect and Her Apparent of the Royal House of Bourbon Two Sicilies; Her Royal Highness Princess Camilla

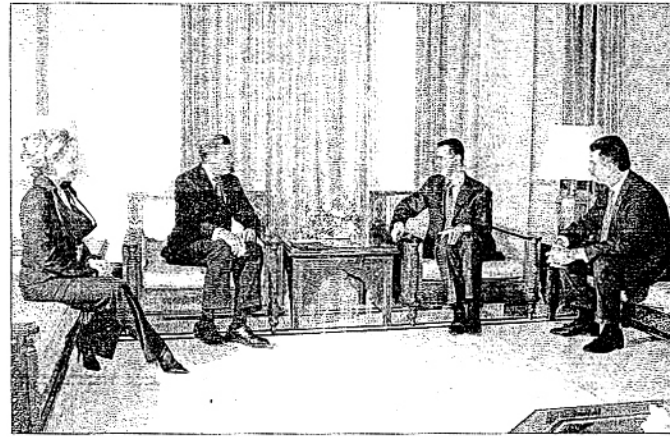
of Bourbon Two Sicilies, Duchess of Calabria; and His Excellency Mr. Anthony Baily, St. George's Order's Delegate for Relations with Foreign States. Following the meeting, the President was bestowed the orders of highest honour, the Knight Grand Cross of the Order of Francisco I, and the

Benemerenti Gold Medal of the Constantinian Order, in recognition of the important and vital work which His Excellency and the Government of the Syrian Arab Republic have undertaken in relation to the promotion of greater understanding, dialogue and peaceful co-existence between the followers of all faiths in Syria.

The Grand Magistry of the Sacred Military Constantinian Order of Saint George indicated that President Bashar al-Assad has become the first Muslim Head of State to be recognized by the Order for his contribution to interreligious dialogue and understanding by a Catholic Institution. Then, the President

bestowed on His Royal Highness Prince Carlo of Bourbon and Mr. Anthony Baily the Syrian Order of Merit, First Class. On the occasion, the President delivered a speech in which he expressed his happiness for being between the highest Catholic order, and bestowing on His Royal Highness

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President receives Duke of Calabria

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The President also expressed his happiness that the order he was bestowed came with the blessing of His Holiness Pope John Paul II, whose positions are appreciated especially towards major world issues.

The President pointed out that the importance of this occasion lies in the fact that it expresses a common vision of many great human values which have embodied in the teachings of Islam and Christianity. This common vision confirms that these values didn't disappear, but rather they are strengthening day by day in the world. It also gives evidence of the falsity of the notion of the clash of civilizations. It tells that there is dialogue between civilizations.

The most important of any civilization is the human one, despite the importance of other aspects. But the human one calls for understanding between faiths, civilizations and cultures.

The President clarified that Syria though small in

the area and population, is big in its history, heritage and society, which expresses a social richness. It is not the long history which made this society rich, but the different positions which have been taken over the history, where Muslims and Christians stood together as one body in the face of many invasions and wars launched against the country.

And the tomb of John the Baptist lies in this mosque, and was visited by the Pope Paul when he came to Syria.

The President went on to say: "Syria today is probably the only country in the world that has some of its population still speaking Aramaic, the language of Jesus Christ. And neither history nor the state alone can preserve a language... All the other factors such as fraternity and living as one society and one body are the ones that consolidate the simple examples that I have mentioned."

"I consider this medal not only for me but for the Syrian society and the Syrian history which we are proud of... And I can assure you and the whole world that Syria as has played this role for over 1400 years will play the same role con-



fidently in the future.

Once more, thank you for this initiative, and I thank Pope John Paul II. Syria will remain the bridge that links civilisations, religions, cultures, individuals and societies.

Welcome again to Syria, the President concluded.

The ceremony was attended by Foreign Minister Farouk al-Shara', Minister of Awqaf, Islamic Trusts, Mohammad Ziada, Minister of Tourism Saadallah Agha. Qalaa, Minister of Presidential Affairs, Ghassan Laham, Mufti of the Republic,

Sheikh Ahmad Kiftaro, Mufti of Damascus, Mohammad Abdul-Bari, the Omani Ambassador to Syria, the Vatican Charge d'Affaires, European Commission Ambassador, Muftis of Aleppo, and other Christian men of religion.