Address of Robert Cardinal McElroy
In Commemoration of the Historic Najaf Summit

It is a great honor and joy to join with you this evening. When I met with the leadership of the Council last October, I was deeply moved by the warm welcome you gave to me on becoming Archbishop of Washington, and when you invited me to participate in this evening's commemoration, I was eager to do so because of the profound importance of the encounter five years ago between Grand Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani and Pope Francis.

The Summit itself was enshrouded in deep symbolic gestures of mutual respect between the two religious leaders as a sign of the mutual respect that should characterize all relationships between Muslims and

Catholics. Pope Francis took off his shoes as he entered the Grand Ayatollah's home, and Ayatollah al-Sistani rose to greet him. In these two gestures of esteem rooted in God and our human dignity that crosses every barrier of religious conflict, the importance of the Summit reverberates to this present moment, signaling how far we have come and yet how much farther we have to go to attain God's vision of unity and embrace between our two religious communities.

During the Summit, the role of our common faith as a source of union rather than conflict, was a central theme. I remember when I was a new bishop in 2010 chairing the Catholic- Muslim dialogue for the Western United States. Dr. Sayed Moustafa al-Qazwini was giving a presentation on the common elements of faith that bound us together

on the deepest level. At that moment, my own desire for Muslim-Catholic dialogue changed from being a commitment rooted in the importance of unity among diverse religious communities to a commitment rooted in the profound common ties of faith that I had been unaware of before. It is this quest for understanding rooted in common affirmations of faith that is the firmest and most important foundation for a sustainable relationship between our communities of faith. Both Pope Francis and the Grand Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani recognized this, and took steps to insure progress in mutual dialogue and the search for truth that have born great fruit in the past five years. We ourselves must deepen and encourage this quest for truth and the

religious impulse that turns us all toward the One and eternal God.

A second theme of the Summit was the common assertion that the dignity of the human person, rooted in God and the moral life is the authentic foundation for building societies reflective of God's call to us. The statement of the Ayatollah outlined the broad scope of the assaults on human dignity in the world: "injustice, oppression, poverty, religious and intellectual persecution, the suppression of basic freedom, and the absence of social justice." Both Pope Francis and the Grand Ayatollah witnessed to these same realities and the fundamental role of religious communities in combatting them. They made clear that for our two faiths combatting these evils within the global family constitute

major elements of our mission from God. The events of the last five years have made it ever more clear that this pivotal mission of faith in the world has only grown more urgent, rather than less. For us here in Washington, may the safeguarding of the dignity of all men and women and families be a growing source of common witness by the Council of Shia Scholars and the Archdiocese. For our nation was founded in the belief the experiment in democracy whose 250th anniversary we celebrate today would be enriched and safeguarded by the constant religious witness. Never has the need for that witness been more apparent.

Finally, The Najaf Summit pointed to the urgency of a global interreligious witness for an end to war in the world. Tragically we mark this fifth anniversary at a

moment of warfare between the United States and Iran. Catholic teaching proclaims that in keeping with the teachings of Jesus Christ to be peacemakers in the world, Christians should always seek to avoid war because it so fundamentally contradicts the will of God for humanity and is a sign of the evil impulses within the human heart that is amplified by the weapons of mass destruction in our own day.

Catholic teaching on war and peace recognizes that there are rare instances in which recourse to war may be justified. But even in such a case the launching of a war can only be contemplated if five conditions are simultaneously met:

1. The attack upon your country or other injured nation must be grave lasting and immediate.
2. All other means of resolving the conflict must have been tried.
3. The destructive consequences of going to war must not outweigh that good that war may accomplished.
4. The government is seeking war for a right reason, i.e. the restoration of peace with justice.
5. Those entrusted with the common good in society must approve of the recourse to war.

Our current war in Iran does not meet these criteria for three reasons. The destructive consequences of this war in terms of lives, economic disruption and human suffering have clearly outweighed its accomplishment for good, with no end in sight. Secondly, our

government has no clear right intention; rather, our intention has shifted on an almost daily basis. The decision to go to war was not precipitated by an immediate and grave threat. This was a preventative war based on potential injuries in the future which is not allowed in Catholic teaching.

Pope Leo has been unrelenting in his calls for peace amidst this conflict. And this night I know those calls for peace encompass us all. They echo beautiful vision and urgency present that day five years ago when Grand Ayatollah al-Sistani and Pope Francis met so dramatically at Najaf. And in honoring them and that summit tonight, we are giving praise to God as people of the Book.