

Call on the Archbishop to set up interfaith group

The president of the US-based Universal Society of Hinduism welcomed the Maltese Church's plans to teach schoolchildren about other faiths during religion lessons.

Rajan Zed also urged Archbishop Paul Cremona to form an interfaith group with other religions present in Malta and work together towards replacing the subject of religion with comparative religion.

Earlier this week, Mr Zed, who lives in Nevada, called on the Maltese authorities to ensure that in religion lessons students are taught about major world religions, including the viewpoint of non-believers.

Reacting to this, the Church said it agreed on educating children on other faiths, adding that next month it would be discussing a policy document that suggests introducing students to other religions.

The document will be discussed by the Diocesan Assembly of the Maltese Archdiocese on October 10 before it is presented to the Maltese Episcopal Confer-

ence for approval. The document suggests introducing students to "the beauty found in other faith traditions" without renouncing to the centrality of the Catholic faith,

explained Adrian Gellel, who is responsible for religious education within the Archdiocese of Malta's Schools Secretariat for Catechesis.

Dr Gellel said that comparative religion, suggested by Mr Zed, was about teaching students about other faiths. However, the policy worked towards helping students

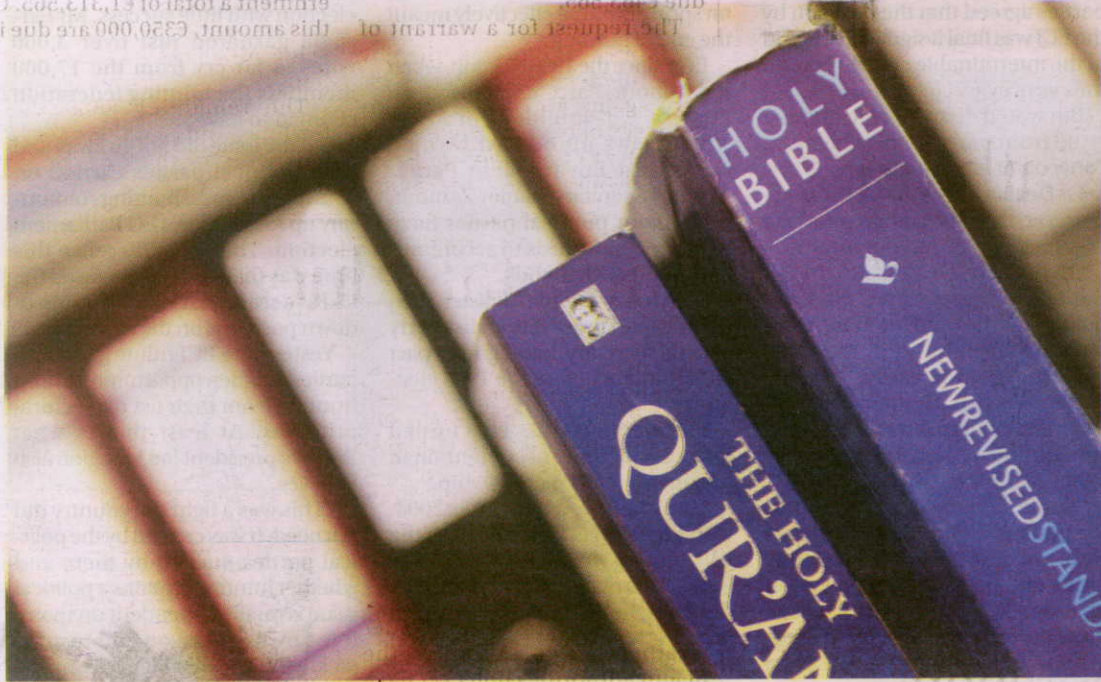
learn from other religions while keeping the Catholic faith as the core.

In Malta, he added, Catholic religious education was enshrined in the Constitution, the Education Act and was in line with the agreement between the Holy See and the government.

In a statement this week, Mr Zed applauded the Church "for documenting that students should learn from the beauty and goodness of other faith traditions".

He suggested that, rather than being decided by the Church alone, religion education should be planned by a group that represented the various faiths present in Malta. He therefore called on the Archbishop to set up the interfaith group.

"Besides Catholic majority, Malta has minority communities of Protestants, Orthodox, other Christian denominations, Muslims, Hindus, Jews and people with no religion... As a dominating majority in Malta, Catholics had a moral responsibility to take care of minority brothers and sisters from different faith backgrounds," he said.



Maltese climate change expert hopeful about Copenhagen deal

Fiona Galea Debono

International negotiations for the upcoming Copenhagen climate change agreement are going "badly and slowly" but Malta's ambassador remains optimistic a deal should be struck by December.

Michael Zammit Cutajar, on the leadership team negotiating the multilateral accord on climate change, does not envisage a deal at the Copenhagen UN conference in December, unless there is some practical move by developed countries to commit to major emissions reductions by 2020.

With the Kyoto Protocol targets expiring in 2012, international negotiations under the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change are being carried out to sign the next agreement in Copenhagen. The Copenhagen deal aims to achieve global consensus on action to address climate change in two years' time.

"Only if you have emissions reduction commitment and tangible action can you ask developing countries to put on the table what they plan to do in the next 30 or so years," Mr Zammit Cutajar said.

Mr Zammit Cutajar is chairman of the *ad hoc* working group on long-term cooperative action, UNFCCC, and also a member of

the high-level advisory group on energy and climate change, convened by the European Commission.

Mr Zammit Cutajar was addressing the seminar, Managing Climate Change - Global, EU and Maltese Perspectives, organised by the Malta-EU Steering Action Committee and the Swedish Embassy.

He said developing countries were looking to their developed counterparts to take the lead: "Unless they act more convincingly, they do not see why they should make the effort."

At the same time, they recognise that, unless they act, the problem cannot be solved either. But they are asking those who caused it in the first place to help them adopt newer and more expensive technologies, Mr Zammit Cutajar continued.

On the other side of the coin, the US looks at China, which is doing well economically, and questions why it should be subsidising it.

However, despite the scenario, which is seeing countries "beating around the bush and not committing", Mr Zammit Cutajar remains hopeful "because there is a tremendous political investment in Copenhagen" as a political event, which could reach summit level.

"We still have three months to go," he told the seminar.

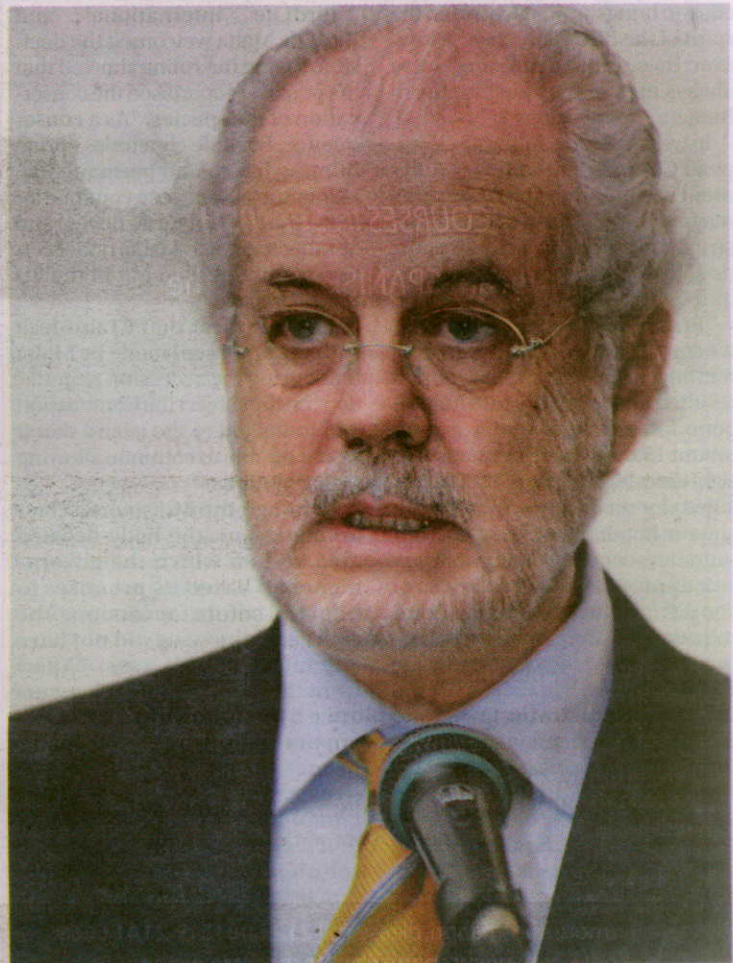
In the negotiations, he also sensed "a genuine feeling that, unless we act quickly, we have a tremendous problem on our hands that we cannot do much to avert. There is a political need to act."

"I think as people realise how badly things have been going, they will start to pull more cards out of the pack," Mr Zammit Cutajar said.

Apart from the EU and, perhaps, the new Japanese government, the other big players had not reached the range of reductions considered necessary, he said. Although he admitted the US was turning around after the Bush Administration, which had not been bothered about climate change, it could not be expected to do it overnight.

Mr Zammit Cutajar said Japanese Prime Minister Yukio Hatoyama was quite revolutionary and wanted to revamp the way Japan worked, mentioning a 25-per cent reduction in emissions below 1990 levels by 2020. This, he said, was tremendously encouraging if he could make it stick politically.

"But he is not Prime Minister for another week, so we have to give him some time to tighten that promise up... If you have the EU promising 30 per cent reductions and Japan 25, that puts immense pressure on the US to do better."



Mr Zammit Cutajar: "Unless we act quickly, we have a tremendous problem on our hands that we cannot do much to avert."