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Spain Hosts 6th Asia-Europe Interfaith Dialogue

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Coinciding with the Spanish Presidency of the EU, the cities of Madrid and Toledo hosted the 6th Asia-Europe Interfaith Dialogue, the aim of which is to promote relations and mutual respect between cultures and creeds from both regions.

The working sessions, which were held at the IFEMA exhibition centre in Madrid, dealt with three main issues: religious freedom and human rights; respect and mutual understanding; and dialogue between cultures and religions as a bridge between societies.

Delegates from 27 of around 50 countries which make up the Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM) attended the meeting, titled '*Consolidating religious freedom and mutual understanding through interfaith and intercultural dialogue*'; the meeting, which was set up in 1996, is a high-level forum between the governments of both regions.

The Asia-Europe Interfaith Dialogue has taken place every year since 2005, either in Asia or in Europe, and brings together diplomats, senior officials connected with interfaith matters, leading academics and religious leaders from different faiths.

This year's dialogue was jointly organised by Spain and Pakistan, and was sponsored by 15 European and Asian countries: Germany, Austria, China, South Korea, Denmark, the Philippines, Finland, Indonesia, Italy, Japan, Malaysia, Netherlands, Poland, Singapore and Thailand.

The event was held in Spain in response to the announcement made in this regard by

the President of the Government, José Luis Rodríguez Zapatero, at the ASEM Summit in Beijing in 2008. The city councils of Madrid and Toledo and the regional government of Castilla La Mancha helped the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Cooperation to organise this 6th ASEM Interfaith Dialogue.

The closing ceremony took place Friday in the city of Toledo.