

American religious delegation seeks to build bridge of peace between Iran and U.S.

Tehran Times Political Desk

TEHRAN - A religious delegation from the United States has come to Iran to meet religious and political figures and the Iranian people in order to “build bridges of peace and security” between Iran and the U.S.

The delegation is led by the Mennonites and Quakers but includes members of many Christian denominations of the United States.

Iranian President Mahmud Ahmadinejad visited the United States in September 2006 to attend the United Nations General Assembly session. Forty-six Christian and Muslim religious leaders met with Ahmadinejad on September 20, 2006 in an open discussion about the role religious communities can play in reversing the deepening crisis between Iran and the U.S.

On Ahmadinejad’s invitation, the 13-member group arrived in Tehran early on Monday and will be staying until February 25. Improving relations between the people of Iran and the U.S. is one of the main goals of the delegation.

“We are here to build bridges of peace and security” between the people of Iran and the U.S., Mary Ellen McNish, general secretary of the American Friends Service Committee, said.

“We are not representatives of the government and we are not sent by them,” she told reporters of the Tehran Times and the Mehr News Agency.

On their return to the U.S., they will “directly go to Washington D.C. and visit Congress to give a report” on Iranians’ desire for peace, she said.

On the first day of their visit, the delegation met Tehran Friday Prayer Leader Mohammad Emami Kashani, and Archbishop Sebu Sarkissian, the spiritual leader of the Armenian Orthodox Christians of the Tehran diocese.

Commenting on their meeting with Kashani, McNish stated, “It was so moving to hear Islam prohibits weapons of mass destruction.”

There are many people in the U.S. who are fearful about Iran, and, of course, they are inflamed by the media, she added.

“We want both sides to forgive each other,” she said.

Ron Flaming, the international program director of the Mennonite Central Committee, said, “As long as the two countries do not talk, there is no trust between them and walls are built up because of that.”

There are misperceptions on both sides, but the delegation is trying to promote mutual respect, he added.