

Vatican settles with Benetton over pope-kissing ad

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c. 2012 Religion News Service VATICAN CITY (RNS) The Vatican announced on Tuesday (May 15) it had settled a lawsuit against Italian clothing group Benetton for using an image of Pope Benedict XVI in one of its advertisement campaigns.

The image had been modified to show Benedict kissing Sheikh Ahmed Mohamed El-Tayeb, imam of Cairo's renowned al-Azhar Mosque.

The Vatican's chief spokesman, the Rev. Federico Lombardi, said the image was "offensive" and stressed that the Benetton group had agreed to remove the pope's images from its campaign, and to ask third parties to do the same.

The Benetton group "publicly recognized it had hurt the faithful's sensitivity," and that "the pope's image must be respected and can only be used with the prior authorization of the Holy See," he added.

Lombardi also stressed that the Vatican chose not to seek any economic compensation in the settlement but requested a "moral reparation" in the form of a "small but effective" donation to a Catholic charity.

Benetton launched its UNHATE campaign last November. It showed global leaders who are perceived as adversaries kissing each other on the mouth, including an image of President Obama kissing Chinese leader Hu Jintao.

The Holy See immediately protested and announced it would sue Benetton for its use of the pope's image, despite the group's promise that it would take down the ads.

The clothing group, which Tuesday reported decreasing earnings for the first quarter of 2012, had announced the settlement on Friday. In response to the pope's image, Catholic activists had launched a "Boycott Benetton" campaign last November.