



**2011**

# **INTERFAITH REPORT**

**World Jewish Congress  
Executive Committee Meeting  
New York, 29 March 2012**



# **INTERFAITH ACTIVITIES REPORT**

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Interreligious dialogue can only prosper if it is rooted in respectful relationships which do not hide or undermine the particularity of different religious traditions. To promote mutual understanding, respect and collaboration between the followers of different religious traditions is not simple, but still it is crucial in these days.

## **Catholic-Jewish Relations**

The WJC has continued its substantive high-level and institutional dialogue with the Roman Catholic Church, with the Holy See, with the Pontifical Commission for the Religious Relation with the Jews, Papal Nuncios and the National Bishops' Conferences.

Some difficult issues are still open with the Roman Catholic Church: the Society of Pius X and Bishop Williamson's Holocaust denial; Pius XII's process of beatification, and Special Synod on Middle East, all still creating tensions and difficulties for the maintenance of the dialogue.

In March 2011 WJC President Ronald S. Lauder has praised pope Benedict XVI for setting an important marker against anti-Semitism in the Catholic Church in his new book on the life of Jesus.

In July 2011 WJC Deputy Secretary General Maram Stern went to the Vatican and met with Mgr. Ettore Balestrero, Under-Secretary for Relations with States of the Holy See; Bishop Josef Clemens Secretary of the Pontifical Council for the Laity; and father Norbert Hofman Secretary of the Commission of the Holy See for Religious Relations with the Jews - Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity.

In October 2011 in Assisi (Italy) WJC Deputy Secretary General Maram Stern attended the "Day of Reflection, Dialogue and Prayer for Peace and Justice in the World" on the invitation of Pope Benedict XVI. WJC-US/NA Executive Director Betty Ehrenberg attended in her role as vice president of IJCIC. The day after the Meeting in Assisi, in the Vatican, Stern and Ehrenberg participated in an audience with Pope Benedict XVI and met with Cardinal Tarcisio Bertone, Vatican Secretary of State.

In November 2011 WJC President Ronald Lauder hosted a dinner at his home in New York (USA) in honour of Cardinal Kurt Koch President of the Pontifical Commission for Religious Relations with the Jews – Pontifical Council of Christian Unity.

## **IJCIC**

A special chapter is for IJCIC, which remains a priority of WJC's interfaith work and a presence in the 'circle of dialogue'. IJCIC is an experience of dialogue with Catholic and Christian Churches, shared with other Jewish organizations, in which the WJC still plays a pivotal role in the organization, mainly focus on the US dimension of the .

In New York, the WJC Office remains the leading center for IJCIC's meetings and gatherings.

In February 2011 on the occasion of 40 years of official relations between Jewish organizations and the Catholic Church, the International Catholic-Jewish Liaison Committee (ILC) held a meeting in Paris, France. The meeting was attended by representatives of the International Jewish Committee for Inter-religious Consultations (IJCIC) of which the World Jewish Congress is a prominent member. The WJC New York and Brussels offices were involved in the preparation of the meeting. WJC USA Director Betty Ehrenberg as Treasurer of IJCIC, WJC Deputy Secretary General Maram Stern and LAJC Director Claudio Epelman attended the ILC Paris meeting.

In December 2011 WJC-US/NA Executive Director Betty Ehrenberg, in her position as Vice Chair of IJCIC, hosted an IJCIC meeting to discuss issues relating to Vatican, the Christian Orthodox Churches and World Council of Churches in the WJC NY Office. The meeting planned a young leaders Christian-Jewish conference, travel plans and budget for 2012.

### **Other Christian-Jewish Relations**

With respect to the Protestant Churches the dialogue remains difficult, especially with the international coordination organization, the World Council of Churches, based in Geneva (Switzerland). However some national and local relations with evangelical and protestant churches, especially in the United States of America, are positive.

In January 2011 in Jerusalem (Israel) then WJC Secretary General Designate Dan Diker and WJC-Israel Chairman MK Shai Hermesh hosted the 5th annual Knesset Christian Allied Caucus dinner that drew a sell-out crowd from Christian communities all over the world.

With Christian Orthodox Churches the dialogue is slow and discontinuous, but continuous, and the dialogue is still open, especially with the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople and his European representative in Paris.

To improve the relations with the Russian Orthodox Church, Chief Rabbi Pinchas Goldschmidt of Moscow (Russia) was appointed by WJC Secretary General Michael Schneider as Special Envoy for Interfaith Relations with the Orthodox Churches joining the WJC interfaith commission.

### **Muslim-Jewish Relations**

In recent years, efforts are also being made in the field of Muslim-Jewish Relations. The WJC strives to facilitate co-operation, dialogue and partnership between Jewish and Muslim communities and to initiate and promote new opportunities for dialogue and co-operation between Jewish and Muslim communities at national, regional and world levels.

In February 2011 WJC Deputy Secretary General Maram Stern was invited for meetings in Jakarta (Indonesia) with the Central Board Muhammadiyah of Indonesia and the Board of the Center for Dialogue and Cooperation Among Civilisations. A special meeting was organized to meet German Father Franz Magnis-Suseno S.I. expert of Islam and in particular, in Indonesia.

In March 2011 in Paris (France) WJC vice President Rabbi Marc Schneier and WJC Deputy Secretary General Maram Stern attended the first meeting of the Committee of European Muslim and Jewish Leaders coo-organised by WJC and FFEU.

In March 2011 in Madrid (Spain) WJC Deputy Secretary General and LAJC Director Claudio Epelman met Bahige Mulla of the Islamic World Ligue.

In March 2011 in Paris (France) WJC Vice President Rabbi Marc Schneier gave keynote speech at Annual Gala Dinner of the French Judeo-Muslim Friendship Association.

In May 2011 on the occasion of the "Europe Day" joint Muslim-Jewish activities were organized around Europe. The events were held in several European cities and a joint declaration was presented to political representatives, to the press and to the European institutions.

In July 2011 in Kiev (Ukraina) WJC vice-President Rabbi Marc Schneier with the support of the Foundation for Ethnic Understanding organized the 2nd annual "Muslim Jewish Conference" for young people. 70 students and young professionals from more than 25 countries, including Israel, Pakistan and Nigeria participated.

In November 2011 in New York (USA) WJC Vice-President Rabbi Marc Schneier and Imam Shamsi Ali joined together in a panel discussion on "Buinding A Global Muslim Jewish Alliance". The panel served as launch for the 4<sup>th</sup> Annual Muslim-Jewish weekend of twining which took place in 25 countries on 4 continents and in which many of our communities have been involved at different level (from local to national).

### **Other Platforms for Dialogue**

In May 2011 WJC Deputy Secretary General Maram Stern with senior representatives from the Christian, Jewish, Muslim religions as well as from the Buddhist communities met on the invitation of President of European Commision José Barroso, President of the European Parliament Jerzy Buzek and President of the Council Herman Van Rompuy. They discussed effective ways of rights and liberties with a view to build a Partnership for democracy and shared prosperity between Europe and its neighbourhood.

In September 2011 in Munich (Germany) WJC Deputy Secretary General Maram Stern attended the "Bound to Live Together" Interfaith Meeting organized by the Archdiocese of Munich and the Community of Sant'Egidio. Stern spoke on a panel entitled "Europe and its Mission in the World". WJC Vice President Charlotte Knobloch also participated in the meeting on a panel entitled "The Strength and Weakness of the Family: Religious Reflections".

In October 2011 in Doha (Qatar) WJC Deputy Secretary General Maram Stern and LAJC Executive Director Claudio Epelman participated in the 9th Doha Conference on Interfaith Dialogue; Rabbi Henry Sobel also participated in the conference, giving a speech at the opening session.

In December 2011 in Jerusalem (Israel) WJC Secretary General Dan Diker and Executuve Director and Chief Counsel WJC Israel Sam Grundweg met with Josh Reinstein of the Knesset Christian Allies Caucus to discuss opportunities for future cooperation.

In December 2011 Rabbi Joel Meyers, Acting Chair of WJC United States attended the annual Chanukah party and briefing at the White House in Washington DC (USA).

In December 2011 in Washington DC (USA), LAJC Executive Director Claudio Epelman participated in the meeting of the Latin American Religious Leaders' Council which took place at George Washington University.