

## **International Interreligious Affairs, April 2009 highlights**

### **David Rosen**

The two major events in my April schedule took me to Tunisia and Cyprus.

In Tunisia, the second academic interfaith (essentially Abrahamic) conference under the auspices of the (University of Tunis') Ben Ali Chair for Dialogue between Civilizations and Religions was held in Nabeul on the subject of "Justice and Peace in the Sacred Scriptures and Philosophical Thought".

As opposed to the first conference some three years earlier, there was a more substantial Jewish presence at this conference through the involvement of the Council for Marseille/Provence/Mediterranean Cooperation which is chaired by Robert Bismuth, cousin of the only Jewish senator in Tunis, Roger Bismuth.

Participation and presentations in the conference came from all the Mediterranean countries and also from the Gulf and Iran.

I was honored to be the Jewish speaker at the opening plenary, presenting the topic of Justice and Peace in the Torah and the Rabbinic Tradition. While the atmosphere was overwhelmingly cordial and generally extremely positive, inevitably there were tense moments such as the question/accusation from an Iranian Ayatollah at the end of my presentation as to how these values can be reconciled with the State of Israel's policies. This however provided an excellent opportunity for me to explain Israel's position and actions as well as to educate about the plethora of interfaith cooperation and Jewish-Arab collaboration in Israel.

Not unrelated to the purpose of the Tunisian Ben Ali chair, are the colloquia of the Middle East Observatory of the European People's Party (EPP, which includes 74 center-right parties from 38 countries) and the Konrad Adenauer Foundation (KAS). The primary purposes of these conferences is to promote relations between decision and opinion makers in the political, religious and other civil society arenas in the Middle East; and to promote dialog among the Abrahamic faiths based on universal values and liberal democracy.

The meeting held at the end of April in Nicosia, Cyprus, was titled "Global Universal Values in the Euro-Mediterranean partnership" and I had been asked to present a Jewish perspective on the subject of "Democracy, the Rule of Law and Human Rights".

Much of April has been taken up with preparations for the visit to Israel of Pope Benedict XVI. In addition to serving on an Israeli governmental committee for the event and preparation for those meetings in which I will be involved (especially with the Chief Rabbis of Israel), much of my time has been taken up with interviews for the electronic and print media from around the world.