

## Archbishop of Canterbury and Chief Rabbis sign historic agreement

The Archbishop of Canterbury, Dr. Rowan Williams and the Chief Rabbis of Israel, Chief Rabbi Shlomo Amar and Chief Rabbi Yonah Metzger today signed a joint Declaration which sets out a framework for continuing dialogue between them. Dr. Williams described the agreement as historic:

“This is a most significant step in developing better mutual understanding and trust between the Anglican Communion and the Chief Rabbinate and worldwide Judaism.”

The Archbishop was supported in the meeting by the Coadjutor Bishop in Jerusalem, The Right Reverend Suheil Dawani and by Bishops Michael Jackson and John Stroyan. The Chief Rabbis were supported by Rabbi David Rosen and by the Chief Rabbi of the United Hebrew Congregations, Sir Jonathan Sacks. The Archbishop paid tribute to Sir Jonathan and to Bishop Suheil for their constructive roles in the discussions leading to this meeting.

The agreement adds to the growing network of bilateral and multilateral dialogues between religious leaders in the Middle East and in the wider world. This network of dialogue is a major contribution to a world in which religious faith is an increasingly important dimension of people’s lives and of national policies.



Photo Credit ACNS Rosenthal

At a reception to witness the signing of the joint declaration, attended by 70 leaders of the Jewish and Christian communities of England, the guests heard a presentation by the Chief Executive of the Council of Christians and Jews and by the Director of the Centre for the Study of Jewish Christian Relations. The presentations illustrated the range of new initiatives taken by these two complementary organizations to take forward relationships between Christian and Jewish communities in England.

Dr. Williams said that the agreement would help to advance inter faith relations:

“This is a potentially fruitful development for relations between Christians and Jews in general and for the peoples of the Holy Land in particular. What we’ve agreed today will provide a framework within which both practical and sometimes challenging issues can be discussed on the basis of mutual trust and respect”.

The Archbishop and the Chief Rabbis also agreed on the need for a renewed sense of urgency in the search for long term peace, justice and security in the Middle East in general and in Israel and the Palestinian territories in particular. The Archbishop and Chief Rabbis called for the greatest possible response to the need now for reconstruction and rebuilding both of the physical infrastructure and of the emotional and psychological relations of Christian, Jewish and Muslim believers in the region. Dr Williams said that the dialogue would make trust and cooperation easier to establish:

“We have acknowledged the tensions that shadow the present situation particularly the ongoing tragic conflicts in the Holy Land. But our hope has rested very firmly on this; that without friendship and mutual confidence, without the ability to speak to one another candidly and lovingly, we shall never be in a position where our relationship can change things and challenge things and move the situation forward.”



Photo Credit: ACNS Rosenthal

The Chief Rabbis emphasized the responsibility of religious leaders to do their utmost to ensure that religion is not abused for violent ends.

Ends

Note to editors

The text of agreement:

Joint declaration by

The Archbishop of Canterbury  
The Most Reverend Dr. Rowan Williams  
and

The Chief Rabbis of Israel  
Chief Rabbi Shlomo Amar and Chief Rabbi Yonah Metzger

1. The Most Reverend Dr. Rowan Williams, Archbishop of Canterbury, Chief Rabbi Shlomo Amar and Chief Rabbi Yonah Metzger of Israel, met in friendship at Lambeth Palace on 5th September 2006/12th of Elul 5766, to commit themselves to a continuing relationship based on mutual trust and respect. They gave thanks to the Creator and Lord of the universe for their meeting. At the end of their meeting they made the following statement:

2. “We meet today as religious leaders, Anglican Christians and Israeli Jews, each part of the wider world community of Christianity and Judaism. We seek a dialogue which draws both on our particularity and also on the universal nature of our respective communities and which makes its contribution to the wider dialogue of the religions of the world in which we share.

3. Our meeting forms a further and hopeful chapter in the long story of the relationship between Christianity and Judaism. It is a story in which Christianity emerges from within Judaism, but includes

down the centuries all too many times of violence and persecution by Christians of Jews. It also includes significant signs of redemption and hope for a fruitful future together, not least in the United Kingdom where the resettlement of the Jewish communities after three and a half centuries of exile is being celebrated this year. The United Kingdom, encouraged by its Christian community, was involved in the origins of the State of Israel and the Church of England was instrumental in initiating the first Council of Christians and Jews in the dark days of 1942. Since those terrible times of the Holocaust a relationship between our communities, nationally and internationally, has grown from the steady work of encounter, discussion, reflection and reconciliation.

4. This relationship has not been without setbacks and difficulties, but for the Church of England and the Anglican Communion this is a commitment that reflects a continued determination to honour the covenant made by God with Abraham. The outworking of this determination is found in many places: in our welcome for the foundational document 'Nostra Aetate' [1] of our sister Roman Catholic Church in 1965 which has happily led to her present relationship of dialogue with representatives of the Chief Rabbinate of Israel; in the recommendations of the Lambeth Conferences of 1988 and 1998 and the document 'Sharing One Hope' [2 & 3]; in the joint declaration by the Presidents of the Council of Christians and Jews on anti-Semitism in 2001 [4]; in the work of the office of the Archbishop of Canterbury towards the Alexandria declaration in 2002 [5]; in our strong support for the inauguration of a national Holocaust Memorial Day in the United Kingdom; and in the statements made by the Archbishop on those occasions [6]. Our prayer is that the Almighty will redeem our past and direct our future.

5. The dialogue between religions is an essential need of our time and requires that all people of faith bend their best efforts to this common task. In this connection we are sensitive in particular to the importance of continuing to develop our relationships of trust with Islam, nationally in our two countries and internationally. For Christians and Jews, however, the task of building mutual relationship has a different and prior basis than our dialogue with any other religion. Our relationship is unique, not only historically and culturally, but also scripturally, and for both religions, is rooted in the one overarching covenant of God with Abraham to which God remains faithful through all time. It is unique historically through the interaction of the Christian and Jewish communities, especially in Europe down to the Holocaust; and it is unique in the contributions made through the arts, science and humanities to a common culture.

6. Our meeting today builds also on the personal relationships which have grown between us from our previous occasions of personal meeting in Europe and in Israel and from our correspondence. We expect and intend that the friendship and respect that we hold for each other will continue to grow and provide an example to our communities.

7. We consider that the purpose of this and future meetings is to provide new opportunities for dialogue between us. Dialogue has profound value in its own right and its purposes are mutual understanding and respect of each others' traditions and beliefs; the sharing of common concerns; the development of personal human relationships, and in all these things an openness to God's initiative. Neither evangelism nor conversion has a place amongst the purposes of the dialogue and we emphasize the importance of respect for each other's faith and of rejecting actions intended to undermine the integrity of the other.

8. We recognize that we meet in the context of troubled times in many parts of a world where religious faith has an increasingly significant place in shaping the thoughts and actions of people and communities. We note both signs of hope and of concern and we seek to play our part in enabling mutual understanding between religions for the good of the world.

9. Amongst our profound concerns is the rise of anti-Semitism in Britain and the rest of Europe, in the Middle East and across the world at the present time. This is a scourge that we are committed to struggle against. Where it is fostered within communities of faith we have particular responsibilities which we will not shirk; where it is fostered by governments or political parties we will openly oppose it; at all times we will seek to educate the coming generations in the history of anti-Semitism, recognizing that there have been times when the Church has been complicit in it.

10. The Holy Land has a very special place in our heritage, as it also has for Muslims. We long for the time of peace and justice spoken of by Isaiah: "I will make a new heavens and a new earth. They will neither harm nor destroy on all my holy mountain", but we are also conscious that we are far from such a time. The Holy Land and its people, Jewish, Christian and Muslim, continue to suffer all forms of violence and its consequences. Terrorism remains rife. Governments and political and religious movements deny the very right to existence of the State of Israel. There is no agreement on the rights of the Palestinian people and the means to mutual wellbeing and flourishing.

11. In these circumstances we commit ourselves afresh to the task of peace making in the Holy Land and we believe that our meeting today is both a sign and a potentially fruitful action to that end.

12. We reaffirm for ourselves today the condemnations of violence made by our colleagues and predecessors such as in the 2002 Alexandria Declaration. We reaffirm our belief in the rights of the state of Israel to live within recognized and secure borders and to defend itself by all legal means against those who threaten its peace and security. We condemn without reserve those who deny a place for Israel and especially those who engage in the evil work of seeking to bring about its destruction. We warmly encourage all forms of constructive engagement, whether religious, humanitarian or economic, which seek to enable closer bonds between individuals and communities.

13. In our meeting today, we have listened carefully to each other and have taken note of those aspects of our common experience and current situations which can form the basis for further discussion and reflection. In this connection we note in particular our respective relationships with national governance and the potential for good and for ill that this offers; our common hopes for the good of our societies; our concern to find ways in which our younger generations will understand and appreciate their faith; and in these times when worldwide the bonds of family and community are weakened, we hope to share the possibilities open to us to seek together ways to their strengthening.

14. In all these matters we have at heart the imperative to seek ways to show the love of God to our fellow human beings and our communities with whom we share our times and places. Our hope is that by this dialogue we may allay some of the misunderstandings and anxieties in our countries by showing a mutual concern for peace, security and mutual respect.

15. Conscious of the above, we express our mutual desire to begin a time of dialogue and conversation in the coming years. We affirm that this will be a dialogue of mutual respect in which we seek only to understand each other better and to strengthen our own communities and their affection and respect for each other. To this end we commit ourselves to further meetings in Jerusalem and at Lambeth and to invite others in our wider communities to join with us. We charge our colleagues together to put in hand the necessary arrangements which will make for further fruitful meetings.

Signed:

Chief Rabbi Shlomo Amar of Israel

Chief Rabbi Yonah Metzger of Israel

The Most Reverend Dr. Rowan Williams, Archbishop of Canterbury

Dated: 5th September 2006  
12th of Elul, 5766

## Notes

[1] 1965 “Declaration on the relation of the Church to non-Christian Religions”. Available at: [www.vatican.va/archive/hist\\_councils/ii\\_vatican\\_council/documents/vat-ii\\_decl\\_19651028\\_nostra-aetate\\_en.htm](http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_decl_19651028_nostra-aetate_en.htm)

[2] 1988 and 1998 Lambeth Conferences. “Jews, Christians and Muslims: The Way of Dialogue”. Extract from the Report of the Dogmatic and Pastoral Section Lambeth Conference 1988

[3] 2001 Sharing one Hope? The Church of England and Christian-Jewish Relations. Church House Publishing

[4] Joint declaration by the Presidents of the Council of Christians and Jews on anti-Semitism in 2004. Available at: <http://www.ccj.org.uk/ccj-frames.htm?contents=articles-docs.htm>

[5] Alexandria declaration in 2002. Available at: <http://www.ccj.org.uk/ccj-frames.htm?contents=articles-docs.htm>

[6] 2006 Holocaust Memorial Day statement by the Archbishop of Canterbury. Available at <http://www.archbishopofcanterbury.org/>