

International Interreligious Affairs highlights, June 2009  
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A significant milestone in AJC's historic pioneering of interreligious relations, were the Jewish-Hindu events held this month in the US. Moreover these events highlighted the successful collaboration of the international, national and local (Chapter) dimensions of our Department and the Agency.

The origins of these meetings were in the two Hindu-Jewish leadership summits, the first in New Delhi and the second in Jerusalem, convened by the World Council of Religious Leaders which brought together delegations under the leadership of the Hindu umbrella organization, the Dharma Acharya Sabha. and the Chief Rabbinate of Israel. This initiative was strongly supported by the Israeli Embassy in New Delhi and the Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

While AJC was represented already at the first summit, AJC co-sponsored the second meeting in Jerusalem which in addition to two days of dialogue between the leading swamis and rabbis; meetings with Israel's top officials including the President and Prime Minister; meetings with leaders of the other faiths in Israel; exposed the Hindu leadership to Israel's geography, history, contemporary life and challenges.

The meetings in the US were designed to capitalize on these two summits as foundations for developing closer Hindu-Jewish ties in the US above all, while also further strengthening ties between the world Hindu and Jewish communities and between Israel and India. They were held in cooperation with American Indian bodies, above all the Hindu American Foundation (HAF.)

The first of these events in the US took place as a special meeting of the Interreligious Affairs Commission, the day before the Board of Governors' meeting, and thus was attended by AJC professional leadership and a number of AJC governors in addition to IRA Commission members . The meeting was also attended by many leaders of the American Hindu community. The leading swamis in attendance had travelled from India specially for this event and in their remarks they emphasized the common values and interests that demand increasing mutual understanding, cooperation and collaboration between our respective communities. This was further highlighted in the specific US context by a moving presentation from the director of the HAF.

The meeting generated much excitement and a strong sense that this interreligious engagement with one of the fastest growing affluent and influential new communities in the US was a watershed in interreligious affairs for AJC and the Jewish community at large.

AJC also facilitated the visit of the swamis to the impressive Central Synagogue of New York, where they were able to see and learn about Jewish sacred texts and worship.

Two days later in Washington DC, facilitated by AJC's Director for Legislative Affairs in cooperation with AJC's Washington Chapter, a second successful

meeting along similar lines took place on the Capitol Hill with Jewish and Hindu leaders in attendance as well as staff from the President's office and other governmental offices, to highlight this bilateral cooperation and its positive value for society at large.

Thereafter, a concluding lunch and discussion was hosted by the Washington Chapter, bringing these events to a fulfilling celebratory conclusion. It is planned to take these achievements from the international and national levels, to further expand these with Chapters in the US where the demography and interest make them most relevant.

See also <http://www.hinduamericanfoundation.org/?q=node/299> and [World Council of Religious Leaders - 2nd Hindu Jewish Leadership Summit Declaration](#).

Pursuant to these events I travelled to Boston to address a colloquium at Boston College on Israel-Vatican relations. While there, I was able to service the Boston Chapter and address both a Board meeting as well as a gathering convened by the Chapter together with the local Archdiocese and the Massachusetts Council of Churches (on the subjects of the recent papal visit to Israel, Jordan and the Palestinian territories and on challenges ahead for Jewish-Christian relations.)

My program in the US concluded with the final IJCIC meeting of my four year leadership tenure.