

International Interreligious Affairs highlights, March 2009

David Rosen

March saw two major interfaith events of the Chief Rabbinate of Israel's Commission for Interreligious dialogue on which I serve.

Catholic-Jewish conference in Cracow, Poland

However the first international Interreligious event of the month was the successful conference on Catholic-Jewish relations held , March 4-6, in Cracow, Poland, co-sponsored by AJC.

The conference, held in memory and honor of one of the heroic pioneers of Catholic-Jewish reconciliation in Poland, the late Father Stanislaw Musial, was hosted by the Ignatianum and Jagellonian Universities and also co-sponsored by the Cardinal Bernardin Centre of CTU; Boston College; John Carroll University and the Tannenbaum Center.

The final morning session on Friday March 6th consisted of presentations of the Cardinal of Cracow, Cardinal Stanislaw Dziwidz (who of course had been the late Pope John Paul II's trusted Secretary) and myself. The conference was well attended by Catholic and Jewish leaders from different parts of Poland but of course especially from Cracow and Warsaw and it received significant coverage in the Polish media.

Chief Rabbinate of Israel/Holy See Commission and Papal audience,Rome

On March 12th , the Bilateral Commission of the Chief Rabbinate of Israel and the Holy See resumed its work in Rome after the suspension declared by the former over the Bishop Williamson and the SSPX affair. Having received explanations regarding the meaning of the lifting of the excommunication on the SSPX bishops; the necessary assurances that none of them would be admitted into the Church without accepting the teachings of Vatican II including specifically Nostra Aetate and the subsequent Church teachings on Jews and Judaism; the Chief Rabbinate acceded to the request of the Vatican to go to Rome to resume the work of the bilateral commission and to meet with Pope Benedict XVI at the same time.

As part of this delegation of four persons from the Chief Rabbinate of Israel led by Chief Rabbi Shear Yashuv Cohen of Haifa, I met with the Pope for the second time in the space of a month. Benedict XVI reiterated his commitment to the dialogue; to combating anti-Semitism; and expressed his hope that his forthcoming visit in May to Israel would further advance Catholic-Jewish relations and also hopes for peace in the Middle East and beyond. All the meetings in Rome were extremely warm and reassuring, focusing on current issues and a review of the state of the bilateral relationship. In addition we met with the Association of Italian Rabbis that specifically held its national meeting in Rome so that they could meet with the Israeli delegation in order to resolve differences over tactics in relation to the Vatican. Israel's Ambassador to the Holy See, Motti Lewy hosted a reception for the delegations and other dignitaries from the Catholic Church and the Jewish community.

Imams and Rabbis delegation to Sderot and Gaza

The World Congress of Imams and Rabbis for Peace sent a small delegation to Sderot and Gaza with a convoy of humanitarian aid to Gaza and games for children in Sderot, to express solidarity with victims of the recent fighting. I was one of three Israeli rabbis together with half a dozen Imams and Rabbis from Europe who visited Sderot ; but obviously Israelis were not permitted entry into Gaza.

Chief Rabbinate of Israel/ Anglican Commission meeting, Jerusalem

The second major interfaith dialogue involving the Chief Rabbinate of Israel's commission was the annual dialogue with the Anglican Communion under the auspices of the Archbishop of Canterbury. Like the meetings with the Vatican, these take place annually, being held every other year in Jerusalem. The Anglican delegation arrived on the 23rd for a two day consultation on the subject of the spiritual meaning of Jerusalem for Jews and Christians, looking at the differences as well as those aspects that link Jews and Christians. This was an especially deep and friendly meeting during which the delegations also met with other Christian and Muslim leaders in Jerusalem.