

## Report – May 2008

Following the Annual Meeting in DC, I had the pleasure of appearing together with Cardinal DiNardo at a special event held by the Houston Chapter. This was the first public event with the Jewish community for DiNardo since having been made a cardinal (the first in the US of Latino background.) The event took the form of a moderated discussion on the Role of Religion in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century.

From Houston to New York to preside over an IJCIC meeting ; and then on to Canada. In addition to receiving an honorary doctorate from Huron College, University of W. Ontario, I met with Cardinal Marc Ouellet, the Primate of Canada and was accompanied to this meeting by Dr. Victor Goldblum, the prominent Canadian Jewish public figure whom I know well from the International Council of Christians and Jews, of which we are both past Presidents. Cardinal Ouellet will chair the Catholic Church's Synod of Bishops meeting in Rome in October. Among the subjects proposed for deliberation is that of the use of the Hebrew Scriptures in Catholic teaching and preaching. This provides a very important opportunity to reaffirm and further advance the positive changes in the Church over the last half-century not only in relation to Jewish texts but also in relations to Jews and Judaism. My meeting with Ouellet was very gratifying and hopeful.

Returning briefly to Israel to participate in President Peres' conference in celebration of Israel's 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary. I was one of the panelists on the subject of Jewish-Muslim relations and emphasized how critically important this endeavor is for Israel and the Jewish people, describing some of the notable achievements we have notched up in this regard in the Middle East and in Asia.

Almost immediately thereafter, the World Economic Forum's Middle East summit took place in Sharm El Sheikh, Sinai, Egypt. Aside from the official program in which I participated in two panels and also addressed the meeting of the C-100 for advancing Islamic-West relations I was able to have a number of meetings with international and Arab personalities, which of course is most often the real value of attending such conferences. In particular I had an extensive discussion with Tony Blair regarding the planned work of his new foundation of which I have agreed to serve on its Advisory Council; and with members of the Saudi royal household on King Abdullah's interfaith initiative.

Returning to Israel, we had a full meeting of the historic Council of the Religious Institutions of the Holy Land (involving the Chief Rabbis of Israel in a Jewish delegation of six ; the head Sheikhs of the Palestinian Ministry of Religious Affairs and the PA Sharia Courts; the Christian Patriarchs and Bishops. Attending and addressing this meeting for the first time was Israel's Minister of Foreign Affairs Tzippi Livni; and Dr. Jorge Sampaio, former President of Portugal and now the UN High Representative for the Dialogue of Civilizations. Livni expressed her appreciation of the importance of the Council and how necessary it was in order to support any constructive moves towards

peace and reconciliation. Sempaio expressed a desire for close collaboration of the AoC with the Council. The Council also issued a joint statement condemning the burning of Christian Bibles in Or Yehudah.