

International Interreligious Affairs, monthly highlights, May 2011

David Rosen

Following the AJC Global Forum, I was in California on behalf of the AJC regional offices

San Francisco, 2/3

My visit to San Francisco included addressing meetings with the local AJC leadership; with leading Christian clergy; leading Muslim scholars at the Zeituna Muslim College; and interviews with local media, (<http://www.jweekly.com/article/full/61752/ajcs-ambassador-of-judaism-rabbi-travels-the-globe-to-promote-interfaith-re/>) as well as an interview conducted by AJC president Bob Elman for the series "Around the world with AJC" (<http://live.ajc.org/watch/>)

Los Angeles, 4-8

Arguably the highlight of my LA visit was the program co-hosted by the local AJC regional office together with Loyola Marymount University. I shared the podium with the recipient of AJC's 2007 Jan Karski award, Father Patrick Desbois of Yahad/in Unum (see <http://www.yahadinunum.org/en/>) to discuss Catholic-Jewish relations under the title "Out of the wilderness: a forty year reflection on Jewish- Catholic relations" (program may be viewed at <http://vimeo.com/24298998>)



Father Alexei Smith, Director of Ecumenical and Interreligious Affairs, Los Angeles Archdiocese



Father Patrick Desbois, Yahad/in Unum

Another major event was held at Claremont University where I addressed both a meeting of Jewish, Christian and Muslim scholars involved in the university's new three faith studies program, as well as graduate students of the religious studies programs.

In addition to "parlor meetings" for AJC leadership, I conducted an AJC study session on "Judaism, the Other and other religions".

The visit included meetings with clergy and a telecast interview together with Rabbi Randall Brown for Zion Multimedia communications that serve a wide Latino/Hispanic audience

New Delhi, 24-27

An outcome of the Hindu-Jewish religious leadership summits (under the auspices of the All India Dharma Acharya Sabha and the Chief Rabbinate of Israel, facilitated by the World Council of Religious Leaders (WCORL)

(see:-http://www.millenniumpeacesummit.com/Hindu-Jewish_Summit_Information.pdf) that AJC has co-sponsored,

was the establishment of a smaller group of Hindu and Jewish scholars, to pursue mutual understanding, study and possible joint publications that will further advance this bilateral relationship.

To this end, AJC co-sponsored a two day meeting in New Delhi focusing on our different and common "Perceptions of God", as well as the concept of "Holiness in Time and Place". The presenters at the meeting were Swamis Dayananda Saraswati and Swami Avdeshananda Giri (both of whom head the Acharya Sabha and lead millions of followers) Rabbi Professor Daniel Sperber (of Bar Ilan University, recipient of the Israel Prize , and editor of the Encyclopedia of Jewish Customs) and myself.

The event, chaired by Mr. Bawa Jain, SG of the WCORL, was remarkable not only for the quality and depth of the discussion and the discovery of profound similarities in the Jewish and Hindu traditions notwithstanding the significant differences; but perhaps above all for the sense of deep friendship and mutual respect that had developed over the previous meetings and was intensified further on this occasion. AJC's South Asia representative Ms. Priya Tandon, as well as the head of the Jewish community in Delhi, Mr. Ezekiel Malekar, were included in the meeting.



Seated in front, left to right:

Swami Krishnananda

Swami Avdeshanan Giri

Mr Bawa Jain

Swami Dayananda Saraswati

Rabbi David Rosen

Mr Oded Wiener

Rabbi Prof. Daniel Sperber.

Standing behind Swami Dayananda and Rabbi Rosen are Priya Tandon of AJC, and Ezekiel Malekar of the New Delhi Jewish community

Similarly as on the occasion of the first Jewish-Hindu summit, the Jewish delegation again availed itself of the opportunity to meet with other religious communities of India. That first visit led to the historic meeting with the leadership of the All India Council of Mosques and Imams, presided over at that time by Maulana Jameel Ilyassi and the joint Muslim-Jewish declaration for peace he signed together with the Chief Rabbi of Israel. That in turn led to the visits to Israel of delegations from the All India Council of Mosques and Imams under the leadership of Maulana Jameel Ilyassi (who passed away last year) and his son Imam Umer (who has succeeded his father as president of the organization) and their recognition for their leadership and courage at the subsequent AJC Annual Meeting in Washington D.C.

Accordingly on this occasion the Jewish delegation from Israel met with Imam Umer Ilyasi; his colleague Dr. Khwaja Ahmed (who had been AJC's initial contact into the Indian Muslim community via our Chicago office); and Maulana Wahiddudin Khan, arguably the most internationally famous Indian Muslim scholar of our times and a great friend and advocate of the Jewish people. Both Israeli Ambassador Mark Sofer and I addressed this Muslim-Jewish meeting on the importance of Muslim-Jewish relations and the contribution of Indian Muslims to promoting Muslim-Jewish understanding and cooperation.



Seated in front, left to right:
Rabbi David Rosen
Ambassador Mark Sofer
Imam Umer Ilyasi
Maulana Wahiddudi Khan
Mr Oded Wiener

A new ground in international interfaith relations was broken by the meeting of the highest leadership of the Sikh community which traveled from Amritsar in order to meet with the Jewish delegation. The head of the Golden Temple declared this to be the first ever official meeting with Jewish leadership and expressed the hope that this will lead to a deepening of the relationship and furthering mutual understanding and cooperation.



Being presented with a gift by
Giani Gurbachan Singh Jathedar
Akai Takht from the Golden
Temple, Amritsar and Sardar Avtar
Singh Makkar, President, Sikh
Council

Another "first meeting" was held with the leadership of the Jain community in India, which while it sees itself as part of the wider Hindu culture, nevertheless preserves its own particular religious identity.

(<http://www.ajc.org/site/apps/nlnet/content2.aspx?c=ijlTI2PHKoG&b=2818295&ct=10843675¬oc=1>)