

## Monthly Highlights

November 2012

*International Interreligious Affairs*

November was an unusually packed month replete with international engagements, beginning in India.

### **Rishikesh, Nov. 1-3**

One of the most important Hindu leaders of our times, Swami Chidanand Saraswati ( see <http://www.parmarth.com> ), held his 60<sup>th</sup> birthday celebrations with an impressive interfaith gathering and conference on Religions and the Environment at his Ashram in Rishikesh, attended by a remarkable array of major leaders from the different faith communities in India (although principally from the streams of Hinduism). I was invited to speak at the conference and the celebrations as the sole official Jewish representative at the events.





### **New Delhi, Nov. 4**

Thereafter I spent a day in New Delhi for four major meetings set up by AJC's India representative Priya Tandon who accompanied me (and had also attended the Rishikesh meeting.)

The first was with essentially a courtesy visit with the head of the Jain religion at his headquarters in New Delhi.

However Priya had been working for many months on arranging a private meeting for me with arguably the most important Muslim leader in India. The occupant of the position as the head of the largest and main mosque in New Delhi is known as the Shahi Imam;



and the current incumbent is Syed Ahmed Bukhari.

He is known to be a hardliner with strong negative attitudes towards the United States and Israel. Priya had thus been told by many leaders including the Israeli Ambassador to India , that while they thought it extremely important to try to get the Imam to meet a Jewish religious figure, they

considered it very unlikely that he would agree. However working through the Imam's advisors, Priya succeeded in pulling it off and we were received by the Imam in his office at the mosque complex. At first the atmosphere was rather strained and he launched into a litany of complaints against the US and Israel; but by the end of the meeting of more than an hour, the atmosphere was friendly and engaged. While I doubt that I changed his world outlook fundamentally, this was the first time he had met a Jew let alone a rabbi and it was clear that his attitude changed as a result. He expressed a desire to continue the relationship and even explore ways in which interreligious dialogue may contribute to peace.

Particularly in light of this meeting, the Israeli ambassador Alon Ushpiz had invited me to his residence for a discussion with him and his DCM. Priya accompanied me here as well and subsequently updated them on our meeting with the Shahi Imam.

The last event of the day was an interfaith dinner with an array from the interfaith partners that we have developed relationships with in India – Hindu, Muslim and Christian - either through interfaith events and organizations; through Project Interchange trips to Israel; and with delegations of religious leaders brought to Israel by the Israeli Embassy and MFA. I opened this meeting, held at Habitat House, with a presentation in interfaith relations in Israel and then on an initiative to establish a universal code for the protection of holy sites, which was followed by a lively discussion.



### **Washington D.C., Nov. 6-9**

The original reason for continuing on to Washington D.C, from India was to attend the Common Ground Awards on November 8<sup>th</sup>, at which I was to be honored for my interfaith work, together with Lord George Carey (former Archbishop of Canterbury) and Imam Faisal Abdel Rauf, by the organization Search for Common Ground (see [www.sfcg.org](http://www.sfcg.org) .) However the extra time I had available in Washington, enabled me to service the AJC Regional office which used it to maximal advantage.

This included a courtesy visit with Cardinal Donald Wuerl, the Catholic Archbishop of Washington; and a program at Georgetown University in cooperation with office of the President, at which President De Gioia interviewed me on Jewish-Catholic relations before an invited audience. (see <http://blog.georgetownvoice.com/2012/11/07/rabbi-david-rosen-discusses-catholic-jewish-relations-in-riggs/> ; [http://guevents.georgetown.edu/event/lecture\\_catholic-jewish\\_relations\\_with\\_rabbi\\_david\\_rosen#.UKo7G9XiiPo.email](http://guevents.georgetown.edu/event/lecture_catholic-jewish_relations_with_rabbi_david_rosen#.UKo7G9XiiPo.email);



President DeGioia interviews David Rosen in Riggs Library. The topic was, "Achievements, Challenges, and Experience in Jewish-Catholic Relations."

I gave a briefing to the AJC Washington Board on Interreligious Relations in and in relation to Israel and the Middle East; addressed a gathering of Project Interchange alumni and faith and ethnic leaders in DC on the subject of Religion, War and Peace in the Middle East; spoke at an AJC Policy Forum for diplomats and think tank leaders on the subject of Challenges for Israel as a Jewish, Democratic State; and participated and spoke at the inaugural meeting of the Jewish-Mormon dialogue in Washington D.C. initiated by AJC.



In addition, I addressed a gathering at the United States Institute for Peace on interfaith issues and in particular on the King Abdullah Interfaith Center being established in Vienna, which was due to be launched some two weeks later.

**The Common Ground Awards ceremony** and reception was held on the evening of November 8<sup>th</sup> at the Carnegie Institution for Science. In addition to the interfaith awards, recognition was given to remarkable individuals from around the world, not least of all the late US Ambassador to Libya, Chris Stevens. US Secretary of State, Hilary Clinton, spoke in memory of Stevens at the ceremony.



Left to right: Rabbi David Rosen & Mrs Sharon Rosen; Imam Faisal Abdul Rauf & Ms Daisy Kahn; Lord George Carey & Lady Eileen Carey; and Susan Collin Marks of SFCG

(see: <http://www.sfcg.org/sfcg/2012awards/interfaith.html> ;

<http://www.jta.org/news/article/2012/11/13/3111781/ajcs-rosen-receives-interfaith-award-with-top-anglican-cleric-iman>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XtmJnEeCmwk>

[http://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/guest-voices/post/carey-search-for-common-ground-is-a-light-in-a-dark-world-but-the-light-it-gives-is-hope/2012/11/12/0ab3dab2-2ce5-11e2-89d4-040c9330702a\\_blog.html](http://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/guest-voices/post/carey-search-for-common-ground-is-a-light-in-a-dark-world-but-the-light-it-gives-is-hope/2012/11/12/0ab3dab2-2ce5-11e2-89d4-040c9330702a_blog.html) )

The following morning, Lord Carey, Imam Rauf and I, addressed a gathering of journalists convened at the El Hibri Charitable Foundation, on the subject of Religion in US media and abroad.

### **Antwerp, Nov. 11<sup>th</sup>**

From the US, I returned home via Antwerp where I gave a presentation to a large audience convened by the local branch of the Catholic community of Sant Egidio, on the significance of Nostra Aetate on the occasion of the fiftieth anniversary of the convening of the Second Vatican council.



(see <http://www.santegidio.be/event/conferentie-van-rabbijn-david-rosen-en-holocaustherdenking>

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eioyUWfz7hk&feature=youtu.be> )

This was followed by a candle light procession through the streets of Antwerp to the memorial for the victims of the Shoah – an event that the community holds every year on the anniversary of the deportation of the Jews to the concentration camps both in Rome, Antwerp and elsewhere. I also addressed the participants in the procession at the memorial.



### **Vienna, Nov.22<sup>nd</sup>**

The launch of the King Abdullah International Center for Interreligious and Intercultural Dialogue (KAICIID). ([www.kaiciid.org](http://www.kaiciid.org)) was a remarkable event (see <http://www.kaiciid.org/en/kaiciid-day/>)

The day began with a morning dedicated to highlighting "best practices" in interfaith relations in keeping with KAICIID's declared intent to serve as a hub and to empower interfaith cooperation and initiatives around the world. Some four hundred people attended four panels at which some twenty organizations from around the world working in different areas of interfaith collaboration – cultural, educational, human rights, environmental, conflict resolution/reconciliation etc. "presented their wares" and developed connections and synergies. The atmosphere was very energetic and positive.



I moderated one of the panels.

In the afternoon the actual center – a beautiful five story building on the Schottering was formally opened. However because the renovations will only be complete in a couple of months this was a "soft" opening and only involved the three Ministers of Foreign Affairs (Saudi, Austrian and Spanish), the nine members of the Board of Directors, the SG and Dep.SG; and of course dozens of cameras and reporters.



Left to right: Dr. Mohammad Sammak; H.E. Metropolitan Emmanuel; Rabbi David Rosen; Revd. Fr. Miguel Ayuso; Swami Agnivesh; Dr. Ata'ollah Mohajerani; Revd. Kosho Niwano; Revd. Dr. Toby Howarth; Dr. Hamad Al-Majed

The evening official gala event was quite an extravaganza attended by over seven hundred guests from around the world – including distinguished politicians and diplomats as well as religious leaders.

The main speakers were UN Secretary General Ban Ki Moon and the Ecumenical Orthodox Patriarch, Bartholomew. There were video message of greetings from Kings Abdullah and Juan Carlos as well as from the Austrian President. The three Ministers of Foreign Affairs spoke as did Dr. Abdullah Turki of the World Muslim League and Rabbi Pinchas Goldschmidt (of Moscow) as President of the Conference of European Rabbis.

The Jewish representation included rabbis from three continents and major figures from the Jewish communities of Europe, the US, Latin America, Australia and Turkey.

The members of the Board of Governors, of which I am one, (see:- <http://www.kaiciid.org/en/team/board-of-directors/board-of-directors-kopie.html> ) were called up on the stage to sign the affirmation of KAICIID and for the group photos with the speakers.



There were magnificent musical and artistic performances – including a special composition for the occasion that involved Jewish and Muslim musicians together with a Viennese chamber orchestra; and even though the event went on for far too long (almost six hours !), the atmosphere was electric.

At the gala, the first three projects of KAICIID were announced.

1. Working with UNICEF to enlist religious leadership and communities to reduce infant mortality in the developing world through hygiene education

2. a series of educational conference involving governmental ministries on interfaith education

3. An annual Fellows program for five persons from each of the religions represented on the Board , primarily for those studying for the ministry or seeking to serve their own religious communities in other ways; to enable them to pursue interfaith studies/activities through the Center; contributing to the latter's local programming and developing a future generational interfaith community.

There was extensive media coverage of the event. See:

<http://uk.reuters.com/article/2012/11/21/us-religion-interfaith-centre-idUKBRE8AKONG20121121>

(reprinted widely including MSNBC and Huffington Post)

<http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/49943150>

[http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2012/11/24/saudi-interfaith-center-o\\_n\\_2184127.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2012/11/24/saudi-interfaith-center-o_n_2184127.html) )

<http://www.ncregister.com/blog/israeli-rabbi-vatican-official-and-saudi-king-join-forces-for-peace/>

<http://www.newsmax.com/Newsfront/Israeli-rabbi-David-Rosen/2012/11/28/id/465764>

<http://www.ynet.co.il/articles/0,7340,L-4312051,00.html>

<http://stlouisreview.com/article/2012-11-27/vatican-says-it-will>

<http://www.catholicnews.com/data/stories/cns/1204977.htm>

<http://www.marketwire.com/press-release/-1729683.htm>

<http://ww2.onislam.net/english/news/global/460165-saudi-interfaith-center-stirs-debates.html>

<http://derstandard.at/1353207250291/Religion-muss-Teil-der-Loesung-werden>

<http://www.faz.net/frankfurter-allgemeine-zeitung/dialog-im-namen-des-saudischen-koenigs-11971883.html>