



## Monthly Highlights

### October/November 2015

#### *International Interreligious Affairs*

#### Athens, Greece

October 18-19

The Government of Greece through its Ministry of Foreign Affairs convened a high level gathering of political civic and religious figures from the Middle East to address the question of Religious Extremism in the region. The Orthodox Christian representation was extremely impressive (including inter alia both the Ecumenical Patriarch and the Patriarch of Jerusalem) and a number of Foreign Ministers attended and spoke including from Egypt and the Gulf. However I was the only Jew and the only Israeli to speak and apparently the only one to be invited.

The gathering reflected Greece's intent to be more involved in Middle East issues via the interreligious track, in particular on behalf of Christians in the region. At the meeting the intention was announced to establish an Observatory/Research Inst. to this end.



## October 20-21

AJC co-sponsored a Jewish-Christian Orthodox colloquium together with the Greek Orthodox Ecumenical Patriarchate on Oct.20/21 in Athens at the initiative of Israel's Ambassador to Greece, Irit Ben-Abba to celebrate 25years of Israel-Greece diplomatic relations, on the subject of Spiritual Centers and Diasporas. The conference had originally been scheduled for June but was postponed due to the uncertain situation in Greece at that time. In light of the abovementioned Greek Ministry of Foreign Affairs conference, it was decided to hold our symposium immediately thereafter enabling participation of a number of hierarchs who would already be in Athens. The successful colloquium concluded with an official declaration and reception at the residence of the Israeli Ambassador.

Below is the communique issued by the Israeli Embassy in Athens

### **JEWISH AND ORTHODOX CHRISTIAN LEADERS ENGAGE IN POSITIVE "SPIRITUAL DIPLOMACY" IN ATHENS MEETING.**

A highly successful Inter-Faith Dialogue and International Conference between distinguished Jewish and Orthodox Christian leaders in Athens concluded at a special event held at the residence of the Ambassador of Israel to Greece, Ms. Irit Ben-Abba last Wednesday (22 October). The coordinators of the dialogue Rabbi David Rosen, Director of Interreligious Affairs at the American Jewish Committee, and the Metropolitan of France, His Eminence, Mr. Emmanuel, addressed the gathering in the presence of many Rabbis, high ranking Orthodox clergymen, Greek MPs, academics and other distinguished personalities.

On October 21-22, the representatives of the two faiths participated in an international conference in Athens on "**Spiritual Centers and Diasporas**" where they had the opportunity to engage in fruitful discussions on common themes in the Jewish and Orthodox traditions like religion, history, society, identity and the Diaspora with the aim of promoting friendship, mutual understanding and combating bigotry.

The congress was held under the auspices of the Ecumenical Patriarchate and the American Jewish Committee (AJC) in the framework of the 25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of Full Diplomatic Relations between Israel and Greece. Participants included the Archbishop of America, His Eminence, Mr. Demetrios as well as important Rabbis from Israel, the United States, France and Switzerland together with high ranking Orthodox clergymen from France, Sweden, Romania, Serbia, Israel, Cyprus, Greece and Russia.

The joint communique of the conference read aloud at the residence of the Israeli Ambassador states that: "the meeting provided a unique opportunity to affirm the bonds of friendship, understanding and cooperation that have been forged between Orthodoxy and Judaism over recent decades, in particular by the Ecumenical Patriarchate under the leadership of his All Holiness Bartholomew." The communique also refers to the common "commitment to freedom of religion and conscience" and "the repudiation of all bigotry and especially violence – in particular when it is used in the name of religion. "Furthermore, the religious leaders expressed a "commitment to work together to combat all negative prejudice and persecution, especially on religious grounds."

The Ambassador of Israel, Ms. Irit Ben-Abba, thanked Rabbi Rosen and Metropolitan Emmanuel for the initiative, stressing its importance since religion plays a central role in the traditions of both Israel and Greece.

Metropolitan Emmanuel and Rabbi Rosen referred to their longstanding friendship and their decades- long efforts to promote dialogue between Jews and Orthodox Christians. Metropolitan Emmanuel underscored the importance of dialogue in promoting

peace and mutual understanding. Rabbi Rosen coined the term "spiritual diplomacy" to describe the interreligious deliberations adding that: "as children of Abraham we have a responsibility to bless humankind, but we must first bless each other."

Other important guests at the Ambassadors' event included the Rabbi of Athens, Mr. Gabriel Negrin, the President of the Central Board of Greek Jewish Communities (KISE), Mr. Moses Konstantinis, the Presidents of the Athens' and Thessaloniki Jewish Communities, Mr. Minos Moisis and Mr. David Shaltiel respectively, several Greek MPs, the Secretary General of the Greek Foreign Ministry, Ambassador Dimitris Paraskevopoulos, diplomats, journalists and friends of Israel.



The Ambassador of Israel, Ms. Irit Ben-Abba, seated between Rabbi David Rosen (Left) and His Eminence, the Metropolitan of France, Mr. Emmanuel, with Jewish and Orthodox Christian religious leaders as well as other guests standing in the background.

I was interviewed by a number of Greek media outlets including:

<http://www.jta.org/2015/11/12/life-religion/more-than-4-decades-on-jewish-dialogue-with-orthodox-christians-still-fragile>

<http://www.kathimerini.gr/836501/article/proswpa/proskhnio/enas-kosmos-me-entash-8rhskeytikh>

<https://mospat.ru/en/2015/10/23/news124024/>

## **Rome, Italy**

**October 26-28**

The official Vatican celebration of the fiftieth anniversary of Nostra Aetate took place at the Gregorian Pontifical University under the leadership of Cardinals Koch and Tauran , see <http://www.news.va/en/news/international-congress-to-commemorate-50-years-sin> , and concluded with Pope Francis' celebration of the event at his general audience at which the guests from the conference were given special prominence and received by the Pope.



The conference consisted of three sessions and I was honored to be the Jewish speaker at the first session on the subject of “the contribution of religions to Peace and combatting violence”. AJC was also represented at this event by Rabbi Noam Marans and AJC’s representative to Italy and the Holy See Lisa Palmieri Billig.

### **Press conference**

I was invited to speak together with representatives of the other religions present at the official press conference hosted by the Vatican media

<https://youtu.be/sGkFiLDhYkk>

### **Media coverage**

<https://twitter.com/kaiciid/status/658971209024020480>

<http://www.catholicnews.com/services/englishnews/2015/rabbi-openness-humility-transform-bitter-relations-into-blessings.cfm>

[http://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/pope-francis-nostra-aetate\\_5630d887e4b0c66bae5a43c5](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/pope-francis-nostra-aetate_5630d887e4b0c66bae5a43c5)

<http://www.catholicnewsagency.com/news/rabbi-from-john-xxiii-to-francis-catholic-relations-with-judaism-have-improved-65886/>

<http://www.ncregister.com/daily-news/rabbi-from-john-xxiii-to-francis-jewish-catholic-relations-have-vastly-impr>

<http://www.npr.org/2015/11/01/453448972/nostra-aetate-opened-up-catholic-jewish-relations-50-years-ago>

<http://vaticaninsider.lastampa.it/en/world-news/detail/articolo/nostra-aetate-44239/>

## U.S. and Mexico

### Dallas/Fort Worth November 4/5

The official Jewish-Catholic celebration of the fiftieth anniversary of Nostra Aetate was held in Dallas in the Morton Meyerson Concert hall attended by some eight hundred people and hosted by the Diocese of Dallas and its bishop Kevin Farrell and the JCRC of the Dallas Federation in cooperation with the AJC regional office. The speakers were Bishop Brian Farrell of the Pontifical Commission for Religious Relations with Jewry and myself.

<http://www.texasatholic.com/2015/11/14/event-commemorates-50-years-of-jewish-catholic-relations/> ; <http://udallas.edu/news/2015/rabbi-bishop-to-deliver-interfaith-address>



Bishop Farrell and I were the speakers at another celebration of the fiftieth anniversary of Nostra Aetate at Brite Divinity School the following evening in Fort Worth.

### Mexico City November 8

In the framework of the tenth anniversary celebration of AJC's BILLA Institute, Cardinal Norbert Rivera hosted a special Nostra Aetate fiftieth anniversary event in the Cathedral which was introduced by David Inlander Chair of AJC's Interreligious Affairs Commission and addressed by the Cardinal and myself as well as by the Israeli Ambassador to Mexico and the Papal Nuncio in Mexico.

<http://tribuna.org.mx/conmemoran-judios-y-catolicos-50-anos-de-nostra-aetate-en-la-catedral-metropolitana/>

[http://www.jewishjournal.com/world/article/at\\_gala\\_dinner\\_mexican\\_president\\_pena\\_nieto\\_thank\\_s\\_american\\_jews\\_for\\_pro\\_im](http://www.jewishjournal.com/world/article/at_gala_dinner_mexican_president_pena_nieto_thank_s_american_jews_for_pro_im)

<http://noticieros.televisa.com/mexico-df/1511/papa-francisco-visitara-basilica-guadalupe-catedral-norberto-ri/>

### New York November 10

The AJC New York Regional Office hosted a special event for the fiftieth anniversary of Nostra Aetate together with Fordham University. Sister Professor Mary Boys and I were the speakers and then we were interviewed by Fordham provost Professor Steven Friedman.



### Vienna, Austria

#### November 19

The Cardinal of Vienna Christoph Schonborn was the main speaker at a special Nostra Aetate 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary event at KAICIID (the King Abdullah International Center for interreligious Dialogue) at which I was also one of the speakers

<http://www.kaiciid.org/news-events/news/%E2%80%9Creligion-not-imaginable-without-responsibility%E2%80%9D-cardinal-sch%C3%B6nborn-kaiciid>