

International Interreligious Affairs, September/October 2008
David Rosen

September

IJCIC-Orthodox, Athens, Greece

On September 11th/16th, Rabbi Richard Marker and I were in Athens, Greece, to prepare for the next IJCIC conference with the Orthodox Church under the authority of Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew. In addition a new Archbishop had assumed the leadership of the Church in Greece and this was an opportunity to meet the new administration.

The person responsible for relations with Jewry on behalf of the Ecumenical Patriarchate is Metropolitan Emmanuel Adamakis, Metropolitan of France and the Patriarchate's representative to the EU institutions. It was he who had extended the invitation for this visit to prepare for the IJCIC/Orthodox biennial conference. After initial discussions concerning this event, the rest of the morning was devoted to meetings at the Archdiocese to become acquainted with the relevant personalities.

Thereafter a very warm meeting was held at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs with Deputy Minister Theodore Kassimis who is responsible on behalf of the Greek government for Religious Affairs and who offered the support of his government for the consultation and expressed the desire for more intimate involvement in the bilateral dialogue.

At both the meetings at the Archdiocese and at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, appreciation was expressed to both AJC and IJCIC for the support and advocacy that helped resolve the recognition of the status of the Patriarch of Jerusalem by the government of Israel; and for the close cooperative relationship that we enjoy with the Patriarchate. Further to the meeting with the Minister, Additional meetings were held with his advisors.

As a result of these meetings, a decision was taken to hold the next bilateral consultation in Athens in 2009, probably in May.

October

Two events of particular note were on my October schedule.

The first was the meeting of religious figures from Israel/the PA at the Arrabida Convent, south of Lisbon, Portugal, convened by President Jorge Sampaio, former President of Portugal and currently the UN High Representative for the Alliance of Civilizations (AoC).

The AoC was originally an initiative of the governments of Spain and Turkey to promote "Islam-West" dialogue and cooperation and was subsequently placed under the authority of the Secretary-General of the UN.

On his most recent visit to Israel, Sampaio met with the Council of Religious Institutions of the Holy Land, CRIHL (comprising the Chief Rabbinate of Israel; the

Palestinian Supreme Shaaria Courts and the Ministry of Religious Affairs; and the Christian Patriarchates and Bishops) of which I am a member. As a result of the AoC's commitment to promote peaceful resolution of conflict in the Middle East and in particular in relation to Holy Sites, members of the CRIHL were invited to join Sempaio and his colleagues for a consultation on ways in which the AoC could support the work of the CRIHL.

The second event was the private Papal audience for a delegation of IJCIC, the umbrella organization of the Jewish world for interreligious relations (and the official Jewish partner of the Vatican's Commission for Religious Relations with Jewry presided over by Cardinal Walter Kasper) that I chair.

The audience was preceded by meetings with Cardinal Kasper (to review current Catholic-Jewish issues) and Bishop Pagano of the Vatican Secret Archives (to receive a report on the procedures involved that could lead to open access to material from the Second World War period and pertaining to the positions and actions of Pope Pius XII); and followed by meetings with the religious and lay leadership of the Jewish community; a briefing with Israel's Ambassador to the Holy See; and a concluding dinner with Catholic and Jewish leaders.