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# MUSLIM JEWISH CONFERENCE

VIENNA 2010

**MUSLIM JEWISH CONFERENCE 2010**  
**OFFICIAL CONFERENCE REPORT**  
Vienna, Austria  
August 1-6, 2010

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***OFFICIAL CONFERENCE REPORT***  
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# I. THE MUSLIM JEWISH CONFERENCE

In recent times, most Jewish and Muslim youth have not had constructive contact with each other. As a result, their opinions and perspectives of one another are largely based on stereotypes and prejudices dispersed by both the media and society. There is considerable lack of motivation in recognizing and understanding the wishes, fears, problems, and hopes of their communities. For almost twenty years, international simulations and conferences, led by and involving young participants, have created innovative models for initiating successful cooperation between various institutions throughout the world. From our experience attending these conferences and witnessing their success, we believe that initiatives that foster these types of encounters are an effective way to build relationships and break down stereotypes. We are strongly convinced that young individuals around the world possess a more globally-minded mentality, and therefore would support multi-cultural and multi-religious dialogue. By offering a safe forum for discussion, our hope was to extend beyond the closed-minded stereotypes that inhibit interaction, and create an atmosphere for Muslims and Jews to work together to strengthen their relationship in the face of many obstacles and challenges that lie in the way.

Our collective faith has no name, but is expressed in our belief that peaceful coexistence is possible. Although we don't expect there to be an easy and fast solution for complex problems such as the armed conflicts in the Middle East, we feel determined to focus our efforts on improving the lack of communication between Muslims and Jews throughout the world. We acknowledge that our strategy will only yield results in the long-term, but our hope is that we can shift the dominant attitudes prevalent in both communities towards mutual respect and appreciation.

In order to accomplish this goal, we collaboratively organized a Muslim Jewish Conference in August 2010. We envision this conference to serve as a platform for youth-driven dialogue with the aim of bringing people together and scientifically contributing to a decline of stereotypes and prejudices.

As young activists, aware of each other's faith, we refuse to inherit a reality of conflict. Having produced a lengthy declaration of ideas and recommendations at our conference, we called upon religious, social and political leaders to act in both, their personal and a collective capacity to promote debate which is respectful, nuanced and productive. Recognizing that religious rhetoric is often used to inflame conflicts, religious leaders bear a special responsibility in facilitating peace- spreading, rather than fostering incitement. We furthermore urge our fellow "young generation" "to pursue dialogue between the communities, and to seize the momentum that was created by this first annual Muslim Jewish Conference.

The Muslim Jewish Conference and its supporters are determined to continue establishing a new language of respect, to keep working productively to create joint approaches to difficult issues and to remain viable as a platform linking together those who seek to make a difference.

This weeklong conference was our first step in converting our dream from theory to reality. Sixty young men and women from twenty-five countries, and four different continents, forged on this journey with us.

The participants represented a new generation of thinkers, doers and allies, who are connected by their belief in the possibility of a new era of cooperation. Our aim is to establish the MJC as well-known name in the field of peace building, providing the possibility for real change in the interactions of Muslim and Jewish communities around the world.

## II. THE CONFERENCE IN DETAIL

### 1. Aims and Expectations

The MJC aimed to initiate and maintain a platform for discussion and networking between Jewish and Muslim communities. The conference also had the aim of identifying future needs, challenges and opportunities for finding and formulating shared positions and recommendations which could be incorporated into an official conference declaration.

As such, MJC is a dialogue and leadership project that targets young leaders of the future from all sectors of society- charging them to take on the following expectations:

1. Develop an inter-cultural and inter-religious language and mechanism for interaction between young academics belonging to both religious groups in order to reduce preconceived biases.
2. Strengthen a vital interest in improving dialogue and cooperation between Muslims and Jews by reducing and preventing the stereotypes and prejudices.
3. Establish a contact and networking framework which can be used by participants in personal and professional contexts.

Please note that the main agenda of the conference is neither a political one nor is it a debate upon the validity of our religions. It is rather an interdisciplinary exchange based on mutual respect and tolerance where differences are being acknowledged and managed peacefully.

## 2. Conference Details

- The first annual Muslim Jewish Conference was held in August 2010 in Vienna, Austria.
- Thanks to our cooperation with the University of Vienna, the venue for our conference was the institute of International Development on the University campus.
- The target group of the conference was sixty young individuals who were strongly interested in establishing peaceful relations between both religions. Prior to initiating discussion between participants, we provided some background about the development and overarching themes of our conference.
- The application process was challenging, and included several directed questions, a personal CV, a letter of endorsement and several small essays describing their motivation to participate in our conference. 190 participants applied for the MJC 2010. Sixty were chosen to participate.
- The MJC took NO conference fee from its participants and subsidized the accommodation costs of each attendee by 80 %. Halal and Vegetarian food was offered for a 50 % subsidized price. The idea was to enable delegates from third world countries to stay at the MJC, but only sixty individuals could be accommodated due to our limited financial budget.
- The six-day conference was composed of discussion committees, guest speakers, open dialogue panels and social events.
- At the end of the conference, our conclusions and recommendations were published in final declaration which we intend to promote through the media and within the Muslim and Jewish communities. Furthermore the United Nations Alliance of Civilisations has agreed to endorse it.
- Additionally, with the establishment of an alumni network, linking local projects with entrepreneurs on the ground and the annual reiteration of the MJC, we are determined to achieve a long-lasting positive impact on the relationship between Jewish and Muslim youth.

### **3. Topics and Committees**

Participants chose from 3 thematic committees, in which the Conference was split. Every committee included up to twenty participants and two chairs. Committee-sessions were held twice a day and represented the main part of the Muslim Jewish Conference. For the engagement of the participants, rules of procedure were designed before the conference and each delegate had to prepare a small scientific paper about one of the sub-topics in his committee.

#### **1. Islamophobia and Anti-Semitism**

A lack of knowledge and experience throughout all societies perpetuates both phenomena; Islamophobia and Anti-Semitism. Presumptions and preconceptions offer fertile ground for xenophobic ideas that reach all corners of the world. The alarming power behind these terms, the legal aspects, and the role of Europe as a hot spot for both communities were the basis for discussion in the first Committee.

#### **2. Education**

It is generally accepted that education is the key to the personal development of individuals and to the health and growth of a country. However, the design, implementation and recipients of education vary strongly. The second Committee was focusing on the kind of knowledge that is imparted through educational institutions, religious influence and the prospects of an inter-cultural approach.

#### **3. The Role of Media**

The media, regarding its power within today's societies, has significant influence concerning the increase or decrease of stereotypes and prejudices. The third committee dealt concretely with the role of the media and its effect on inter-cultural behaviour. Its impact on interfaith awareness was reviewed and analysed for its potential of bridge-building and peace-building activities.

### 3.1 Suggestions for Action

In the end of the Muslim Jewish Conference an official joint conference declaration was produced, addressing all of the three topics, including suggestions for action. It can be found to download at:

[WWW.MJConference.org](http://WWW.MJConference.org)

&

<http://www.scribd.com/doc/36185413/Muslim-Jewish-Conference-2010-Official-Conference-Declaration>

## 4. The Organization Committee

There were more than twenty Students working together on this project, bringing valuable experience and diplomatic skills to the team and expertise in cross cultural dialogue.

Coming from nine different countries Austria, Pakistan, Lebanon, Saudi Arabia, Switzerland, Libya, Israel, UK and the United States of America, the core team was already well trained in interfaith communication. Our interaction in bringing the first MJC to the world showed that inter-faith and inter-cultural bonds can be strong, if only we are given a chance to create them. Together we wanted to show the world that it is not so difficult to overcome barriers and borders in order to talk to each other, in our hearts and minds and geographically.

**Ilja Sichrovsky** was the founder and Secretary General of the ‘Muslim Jewish Conference’. Currently Mr Sichrovsky is completing his Master’s thesis in international development from the University of Vienna. He was born in Berlin as the son of a German mother and an Austrian father. His father’s family has Jewish roots in Vienna reaching back centuries; in fact, one of his Jewish ancestors was knighted by Franz Josef. During his studies, Ilja represented the University of Vienna three times at international Harvard student conferences, winning each time the "Harvard Award for Exemplifying the True Spirit of Diplomacy". Later, he acted as faculty adviser and coach for the Viennese delegation and chaired the peace-building commission at EURASIAMUN. Ilja published a scientific article about studying at an Austrian University as Jewish student six decades after the holocaust.

**Ehab Bilal** was the Assistant Secretary General of the ‘Muslim Jewish Conference’. Born and raised in Vienna Austria, he grew up in a Libyan family. Ehab attended the Vienna International School where he was given the chance to meet and interact with many different cultures and religions. For his higher studies, Ehab graduated from the University of Bradford (UK) with a degree in Economics and International Relations. Ehab’s passion has always lain with event organization and conferences. His motivation for the ‘Muslim Jewish Conference’ came from the multicultural environment in which he grew up and in his quest to build a platform where individuals can speak and express their views in a safe environment. Ehab mentions that he found it hard to believe that people had difficulties expressing their points of view; he was multi-culturally raised to give each human and religion equal respect.

## 4.1 The Team

**Matthias Gattermeier** – Logistic & Security / Austria  
**Asad Farooq** – Organization & Registration / Pakistan  
**Florence Rivero** – Design / Switzerland  
**Yvonne Feiger** – Logistics & Fund-raising / Austria  
**Daniel Gallner** – Finance / Austria  
**Valerie Prassl** – Head of Public Relations / Austria  
**Arthur Resetschnig** – Organization & Fund-raising / Austria  
**Johann Edelmann** – Head of IT / Austria  
**Fatima Hasanain** – Head of Chairs / Pakistan  
**Mustafa Jalil Qureshi** – Chair / Pakistan  
**Eyal Raviv** – Chair / Israel  
**Akshay Ganju** – Chair / United States of America  
**Gulraiz Khan** – Chair / Pakistan  
**Magdalena Kloss** – Chair / Austria  
**Lisa Joskowicz** – Advisor of Chairs / Austria  
**Simone Biach** – Head of Guestspeaker Department / France  
**Laura Jungmann** – Editor and Translation / United Kingdom  
**Stefanie Andruchowicz** – Head of Support Department / Austria  
**Rida Al Masri** – Support / Lebanon  
**AbdulKareem Niazi** – Support / Saudi Arabia

## 5. Guest Speakers

The MJC provided three guest speaker sessions during the week in order to offer expertise, motivation and positive examples by listening to experts and veterans of inter-religious dialogue. Participants were able to engage with the speakers later on more individually through questions and their willingness to be present as well within the conference committees after the speaker sessions.



## 5.1 Speakers in Detail

**Grand-Rabbi Marc Raphaël Guedj** - is the President of the Geneva-based interreligious Foundation 'Racines Et Sources' (roots and well-springs), which brings Rabbis and Imams together to work for peace. He is the former Chief Rabbi of Geneva's traditional Jewish congregation. Rabbi Guedj is a member of the Editorial Committee of the World Congress of Imams and Rabbis for Peace at UNESCO.

**Dr Faouzi Skali** - is an anthropologist and ethnologist; professor at the Ecole Normale Supérieure in Fes, Morocco, and author of many publications including "La Voie Soufi" (The Soufi Path) and "Traces de Lumiere" (Traces of Light). He is also the Initiator of the Mediterranean Institute for Dialogue Project and Director of the Fes Festival of World Sacred Music. Dr. Skali has coordinated a colloquium to follow the festival called Giving Soul to Globalization, a meeting place for humanitarians and international leaders in the business world to work together to develop more space for spirituality in the working world. He was recognized in 2001 by the UN, among seven world personalities, having contributed to the Dialogue of Civilisations.

**Walter Ruby** - has served as Muslim Jewish Relations Officer for The Foundation for Ethnic Understanding (FFEU) since March 2008. A strong proponent of Muslim Jewish communication, reconciliation and cooperation, he organized the FFEU sponsored Weekend of Twinning of Mosques and Synagogues Around the World in November 2008 and 2009. (115 mosques and 115 synagogues in North America and Europe took part in the Weekend of Twinning in 2009 and more are expected to take part in 2010). A reporter before joining FFEU, Ruby served as the New York and United Nations correspondent for the *Jerusalem Post* and Moscow correspondent for the *Jerusalem Post* and *The Forward*. During the 1990's Ruby was a co-founder of Encounter, a pioneering Internet community composed of Palestinians, Jews, Israelis, Arabs and others, focused on fostering dialogue and joint projects.

## 6. SOCIAL EVENTS

Every evening the attendees of the MJC came together to participate in organized social events. The idea was to create a safe environment where Muslim and Jewish individuals had a chance to talk to each other privately, aside from committee regulations and rules of procedure. The personal encounter and the experience of having fun together were the main focus of these events, including:

- Halal & vegetarian barbecue
- Concert – inter-religious music band “Lines of Faith”
- Gala dinner at the Kreisky Forum for international dialogue
- City tour through Vienna

## 7. PARTICIPANTS

More than sixty participants from more than 25 countries attended the MJC, bringing different cultural backgrounds, experiences and the willingness to learn from each other to this years conference.

*Some institutions and initiatives our attendees were coming from are:*

Council of Muslim Students and Academics in Germany  
European Union of Jewish Students  
World Union of Jewish Students  
Austrian Union of Muslim Students  
The Tzedaka-Sadaqah Project  
Interfaith Encounter Association  
Woolf Institute of Abrahamic Faiths, University of Cambridge  
Arab World Center for Democratic Development ( UNIHRD)  
World Jewish Diplomatic Chor  
MePeace.org  
Budapest-Tel Aviv-Beirut Photo Project  
Council of Religious Institutions of the Holy Land

*Some countries our attendees were coming from:*

Austria, Bosnia, Canada, China, Egypt, England, France, Germany, Hungary,  
Indonesia, Israel, Pakistan, Poland, Portugal, Slovakia, Switzerland, Turkey,  
United States of America,

## 8. PATRONAGE & OFFICIAL ENDORSEMENTS & HONORARY COMMITTEE

*The first 'Muslim Jewish Conference' found itself under the official patronage of*

**the President of Austria, Dr. Heinz Fischer**

*Institutions that have officially endorsed us*

**The United Nations Alliance of Civilizations**

**Austria – Federal Ministry for international and European Affairs**

**The University of Vienna**

**The Institute of International Development – Uni of Vienna**

**Hommes Des Parole**

**The Karl Kahane Foundation**

*Furthermore we are pleased to announce the members of our Honorary Committee*

**Patricia Kahane,**  
President of the 'Karl Kahane Foundation'.

**Rabbi Marc Schneier,**  
Chairman of the World Jewish Congress American Section,  
Founder and President of The Foundation for Ethnic Understanding (FFEU).

**Dr. Michael Häupl,**  
Mayor of Vienna.

**Dr. Alois Mock,**  
former Vice-Chancellor and Foreign Minister of Austria,  
former President of the International Democratic Union (IDU),  
founder of the Central European Initiative (CEI).

**Dipl Ing Dr Franz Fischler,**  
former Commissioner of the European Union (1995-2004) and  
former Federal Minister for Agriculture and Forestry in Austria,  
Expert on international food crises and development and Advocate of the UN  
Millennium Development Goals.

**Ibrahim Issa,**  
Co-Director of Hope Flowers School, which is unique in the Palestinian territories in  
its remarkable educational philosophy. It has a special curriculum dedicated to peace,  
democracy, human rights, conflict-resolution and understanding and general topics  
such as women's rights, democracy,  
health and other community concerns.

**Dr. Zeynep Taluy-Grossruck,**  
former Director of UNIDO (United Nations Industrial Development Organization),  
Private Sector Development Branch

**Rafi Elul,**

Advisor to the President of Israel for social and welfare matters,  
former Consultant to the Prime Minister of Israel in social and welfare matters,  
former member of the Israeli Parliament for eight years,  
formerly one of the youngest mayors in Israeli history at age 24.

**Prof. Eveline Goodman-Thau,**

first orthodox woman Rabbi and Founder of the 'Hermann Cohen Academy' in  
Buchen (Odenwald); as its Director she organizes conferences and learner's  
seminaries, especially for Jewish women.

**Abbas Khider,**

award winning Iraqi-German writer (a.o. honorary certificate Iraqi-International  
Cultic Studies Association (I.C.S.A.)).

**André Heller,**

Austrian Actor, Singer and Author.

**Mag. Dr. Jameleddine Ben Abdeljelil,**

Department of Near Eastern Studies - University of Vienna.

**Susanne Scholl,**

Austrian Journalist and Writer, former Head of the ORF-Bureau in Moscow.

**Josef Hader,**

Austrian Comedian and Actor.

## **9. MEDIA COVERAGE**

United nations Alliance of Civilizations – Website, European Jewish Congress –  
Website, Canadian Jewish Congress – Website, The Jewish Chronicle – UK, The  
Vancouver Sun – Canada, The European Commission – Website, Jüdische Allgemeine  
– Germany, Austrian Press & Information Service – Embassy of Austria in  
Washington DC, Webchat hosted by the US State Department and most of the  
Newspapers in Austria.



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## Jews and Muslims discuss Islamophobia and antisemitism

By Beth Alexander, August 12, 2010

Sixty-five delegates from more than 25 countries gathered at the University of Vienna this week for the Muslim Jewish conference, the first of its kind to be held in Europe.

The brainchild of Ilya Sichrovsky, 27, a Jewish International Development student from

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DIE ERSTE „MUSLIM JEWISH CONFERENCE“ IN WIEN

## NEW GENERATION GEGEN VORURTEILE

**Idealismus.** Studentinnen kämpfen in Wien für bessere interreligiöse und -kulturelle Kommunikation.

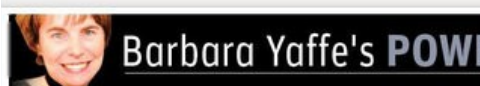
Nachdem die Vorurteile gegen Juden und Muslime in den letzten Jahren zugenommen haben, versuchen die Teilnehmer der Konferenz, die Vorurteile zu überwinden. Die Konferenz ist ein wichtiger Schritt in die richtige Richtung.



Stefanie Andruschewitz, Udo...

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## Muslims and Jews Join Hands

By BARBARA YAFFE 3 AUG 2010 COMMENTS(2) POWER PLAY

Filed under: Canadian Federation of Jewish Students, Muslim Jewish Conference, Vienna

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August 1-6, 2010

## 10. RESUME BY PARTICIPANTS

*"The Muslim Jewish Conference made me believe that Jews, Muslims and others can come together not only on-line, but on the ground."*

Eyal Raviv (Jewish) - Israel

*"Thanks to the MJC, I've met and made friends with wonderful, interesting and passionate people, I've learned to overcome fears and open up, and I am now convinced we can show the world that we as grown up critically thinking individuals do not have to conform to pre-formulated closed concepts of religion, identity or anything else."*

Anna Magnand (Muslim) - France/Austria

*"The Muslim Jewish Conference was a week of highly intellectual, and intensely emotional conversation with individuals from around the world, who share a passion for building relations between our communities. It infused me with energy and enthusiasm to continue striving towards a goal of a brighter, more cohesive future for Muslims and Jews of our generation and for posterity."*

Ben Rosen (Jewish) - Canada

*"The conference taught me that it is possible to change the world, using tools of honesty and humility."*

Andrea Gergely (Jewish) - Hungary

*"The 1st MJC was like an innocent prayer for a better world and I am proud that I was one of its voices that will chorus its journey to absolute fulfilment."*

Hussain Azam (Muslim) - Pakistan

### III. CONCLUSION

There is no better conclusion than to further give the word to the attendees that made this Conference happen. This is a quote from the official Conference declaration:

“We, the youth, refuse from this time on as multicultural human beings to just have the opportunity to learn from one side of the world and to only be able to personally grow by meeting and talking to one part of this earth . We demand our right to be in contact with a whole generation of young individuals just like ourselves, learning about their dreams, fears and aspirations of living a life based upon mutual respect, regardless of religion.

The Muslim Jewish Conference was brought to life because we refuse to keep talking about, instead of to each other. It was initiated to give young Muslims and Jews from all over the world a chance to go and see with their own eyes instead of listening to stereotypes and prejudices.

The Muslim Jewish Conference is determined to become a sustainable name for real change in the hearts and minds of Muslim and Jewish youth and therefore the world as we know it.

We will do nothing less than to insist together on once living in the world we are now imagining.”

*The attendees of the Muslim Jewish Conference 2010*



## IV. APPENDIX/PHOTOS









Vienna, Austria - **MUSLIM JEWISH CONFERENCE**  
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