

# MUSLIM JEWISH CONFERENCE REPORT 2021



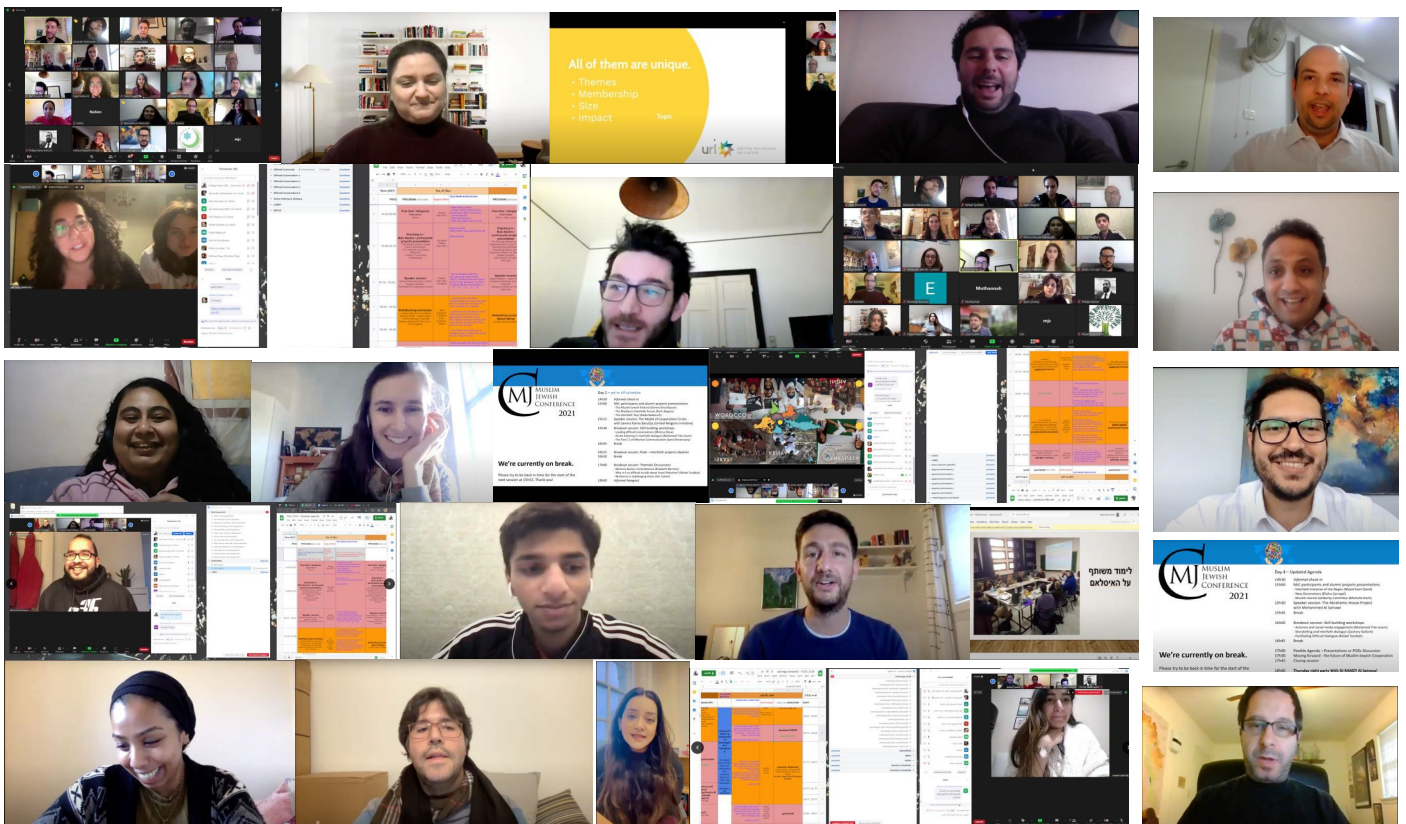
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# WE TALK TO EACH OTHER, NOT ABOUT EACH OTHER.



# A MESSAGE

## FROM ILJA SICHROVSKY, MJC FOUNDER

I grew up in Austria, an open, democratic and liberal country. However, in this environment, looking through the so-called “other’s perspective,” even just for a moment, was portrayed as an endangerment to my very own Jewish identity.

Until one day, Mustafa, a Pakistani student, came towards me at a conference in Geneva, asking if I would have a coffee with him because I was the first Jew he had ever met. Mustafa made me understand that it is not about Muslims and Jews but individuals with names, faces and stories to tell. I realized that I had been part of the problem.

Aristotle said that the mark of an educated mind is to be able to entertain a thought without accepting it. I needed a young Muslim from Pakistan to invite me for coffee in order to finally understand this sentence which a smart Greek guy had already figured out hundreds of years before.

At the Muslim Jewish Conference we believe that the true leaders, the true heroes of our time, are those who heal instead of divide. Therefore, since our first conference in 2010 we have gathered more than 1500 young visionaries for dialogue, grassroots coalition building, and most importantly: friendship.

Participants have hailed from all corners of the globe:

Europe, the Middle East, Central and South Asia, North and South America, Australia, and North and Sub-Saharan Africa. Although young, our participants have been at the forefront of addressing the major issues of their generation.

When Jews and Muslims, leaders of today and tomorrow, mourn together at Babi Yar, at Srebrenica, at Mauthausen and Sachsenhausen; when they share each other’s pain; when they come together in the middle of the Gaza crisis in 2014 in order to have one meaningful exchange with the so called ‘other’; when change makers from more than 55 countries have attended the Muslim Jewish Conference for more than a decade to talk to each other instead of about each other because it is the only place where they can do so: then interfaith and intercultural dialogue between young leaders needs to be taken seriously as a prevention tool for hate crimes, racism and open conflict as much as security institutions are tools to protect us from them.

This is what we continue to do. We humanize the other. Young leaders gather from across the globe to the annual Muslim Jewish Conference to achieve what many still deem impossible: mutual respect through knowledge, interaction, communication, coordination, and cooperation. All of this, because one day, we might be the ones to decide, and the fate of others will depend on us doing what is right, when the time is right.

## WE DON'T DISCUSS CHANGE.

## WE ARE CHANGE.



# THE ORGANIZATION

## ABOUT MJC

We started the Muslim Jewish Conference 12 years ago. We have committed over a decade now to forming innovative networks of cooperation amongst a new generation of Muslim and Jewish changemakers, entrepreneurs and allies, humanizing each other, in order to do the right thing, at the right time. With a budget of less than 1.000.000 Euro from 2010 to 2019, we have managed to become not only the main convener of grassroots and young leaders as well as experts in this field but also the most efficient one. Our reputation is known in organizations such as the United Nations as well as the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe and embassies and consulates throughout this world. We have convened more than 1,500 multipliers through the Muslim Jewish Conference.

**MISSION:** The Muslim Jewish Conference is a grassroots dialogue and leadership initiative that focuses on building sustainable networks between Muslim and Jewish leaders from around the world. The annual conference brings together students and young professionals and invites them to step beyond the boundaries of ignorance and stereotyping in order to build a new global political movement of young Muslim and Jewish leaders, activists and experts who are committed to mutual respect. Conference participants, who belong to all faiths and affiliations, work together to develop and implement projects focused on promoting interfaith and cross cultural dialogue.

**VISION:** MJC envisions a world where global Muslim and Jewish communities exhibit mutual understanding and respect and cooperate to enhance and preserve peace and prosperity. MJC envisions itself as a perpetual creator and sustainer of relationships among global Muslim and Jewish communities to help them talk to each other, instead of about each other.

**APPROACH:** MJC hosts annual, week-long conferences that provide a safe space for ~150 global participants and staff to engage in meaningful dialogue on topics including: confronting stereotypes, discrimination and prejudice, the religion of “the other”, inter-faith and Intra-faith dialogue, Israeli-Palestinian conflict, and genocide awareness. A major initiative during the week is ‘sharing the pain’, where we visit memorial sites of genocide having affected both communities. (Srebrenica 2013 & 2017, Mauthausen 2014, Babi Yar 2011, Sachsenhausen 2016) Visits to holy sites are also included in the program. Participants co-produce grassroots projects, including programs focused on tolerance and education, interfaith or art, which create global and local impact.

**ORGANIZATION:** MJC is led by professionals based in Vienna, Austria and supported by a robust team of volunteers from across the world, including North and South America, Europe, the Middle East, Australia, and Africa. MJC maintains a network of over 1500 alumni across more than 55 countries who work in their own communities to promote the MJC vision and support alumni-led projects that amplify the message and ripple the effect of the conference. Furthermore, they spearhead the attempt to create local chapters around the globe and spread MJC’s vision while creating change on the ground.





# THE VISION

At the MJC 2021, we invited experts in interfaith and intra-religious initiatives, leaders in the fields of dialogue and conflict resolution, and MJC alumni, as well as new participants to join us at the 12th Muslim Jewish Conference. We delved into the challenges and opportunities that the COVID-19 era is creating for Muslim-Jewish cooperation, from issues of xenophobia, antisemitism, anti-Muslim racism, and global challenges to religious freedoms and restrictions.

Over 4 days, we invited participants to project incubation and skill-building workshops, thematic discussions on topics related to Jewish and Muslim relations, religious and remembrance activities, interfaith and intra-faith dialogue sessions, as well as one-on-one and small-group networking and bonding opportunities. During the 2021 iteration of the MJC, we asked: How can Jews and Muslims build resilience during challenging times? What role(s) can interreligious solidarity play in (re)building social cohesion?

Despite the difficulties that event-based organizations are facing in light of the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, the MJC Team was able to convene for interfaith exchange into a digital format. Therefore it allowed to welcome participants from all over the world

The theme of the MJC 2021 was “Building Muslim-Jewish Resilience during Challenging Times.” Because the digital format of our conference did not provide the in-person opportunities for Muslims, Jews, and other interfaith actors, at this conference we focused on communication, coordination, and cooperation between global interfaith efforts. The conference provided global and regional safe spaces to re-connect, assess common challenges, bring together know-how and valuable people and incubate innovative models for Muslim-Jewish resilience during the today’s challenging times.

We discussed themes that have been present throughout the MJCs of the past years – gender and religion, memory, interfaith activism, the arts and more – as well as holding skill-building sessions on conflict resolution, interfaith dialogue, and nonprofit management.

The conference program allowed MJC participants to build local impact with those in their region or sector, as well as to incubate ideas and projects with a resolutely global scope.



# PREVIOUS CONFERENCES

## **FIRST ANNUAL MJC 1-6 AUGUST 2010 VIENNA, AUSTRIA**

The first MJC was held in Vienna in 2010, under the official patronage of Austrian President Heinz Fischer. For five days, 65 participants from around the world worked together in thematic committees and conclusively produced an official declaration addressing social issues: combating antisemitism and anti-Muslim hatred, and the roles of education and media in Muslim-Jewish relations.

## **SECOND ANNUAL MJC 3-8 JULY 2011 KIEV, UKRAINE**

The second MJC was a “call to action,” where 70 participants developed concrete projects to implement in their home communities. The conference also included visits to houses of worship of both the faiths and to the site of the Nazi massacre of Jews at Babi Yar. Over the course of the five-day conference, the committees addressed antisemitism and anti-Muslim hatred, sustainable dialogue, and historical narratives. The MJC 2011 took place under the official patronage of Russell Simmons. Nine projects were created and went through different stages of implementation.

## **THIRD ANNUAL MJC 9-13 JULY 2012 BRATISLAVA, SLOVAKIA**

In 2012, 80 participants divided into four committees developed more than ten projects which have been implemented around the world. In addition to the working committees, a separate business venture track and an arts track encouraged Muslim and Jewish participants to collaborate on specific projects throughout the week. Site visits to the houses of worship of both faiths in Bratislava were complemented by meetings with politicians in Vienna.

## **FOURTH ANNUAL MJC 30 JUNE - 5 JULY 2013 SARAJEVO, BOSNIA & HERZEGOVINA**

The fourth conference was held for the first time in a predominantly Muslim country. Under the patronage of the Bosnian President Bakir Izetbegovic, 100 young delegates from 39 countries worked on joint projects to combat anti-Semitism and anti-Muslim hatred, practiced tools of conflict transformation, discussed hate speech and education and their effects on historical narratives and media, and analyzed the relationship between gender and religion. The young leaders also shared each other's pain when they stood together at the site of the Srebrenica massacre, and recited Muslim and Jewish prayers for the departed souls.

## **FIFTH ANNUAL MJC**

### **10-17 AUGUST 2014**

#### **VIENNA, AUSTRIA**

For its 5th anniversary, the conference returned to Vienna, where it all started, and gathered 120 leaders of the next generation under the patronage of the President of Austria, Dr. Heinz Fischer. In the midst of a summer full of hostility and hate in the Middle East, the situation in Israel and Palestine was discussed passionately but respectfully. Anti-Muslim Racism and Antisemitism in the Media, Rights of Religious Minorities, Historical Narratives and Identity, Gender and Religion, Arts and Culture, and Conflict Transformation were all subjects of intense workshops, incubating dozens of local project ideas. Together, the participants visited a synagogue and a mosque, and traveled to the former Nazi death camp of Mauthausen to commemorate the Jews and Muslims who were killed there.

## **SIXTH ANNUAL MJC**

### **16-23 AUGUST 2015**

#### **BERLIN, GERMANY**

In 2015, under the patronage of the minister of foreign affairs Frank Walter Steinmeier, the Muslim Jewish Conference received 340 applications – the highest response since the conference began six years prior, eventually welcoming 140 participants and 30 team members from 45 countries in Berlin. The conference was strongly influenced by the escalation of the global refugee crisis and focused on the issues of conflict transformation, power, gender and religion, living as a minority, Antisemitism, anti Muslim racism and hate speech, arts and culture, and project development and implementation. We were honored to welcome the US state department's special representatives on anti-Semitism and anti-Muslim racism as well as the German Secretary of State Stephan Steinlein as guest speakers.

## **SEVENTH ANNUAL MJC**

### **7-14 AUGUST 2016**

#### **BERLIN, GERMANY**

For the second time, the Muslim Jewish Conference took place in Berlin, a city that has shown continued support for our mission. We innovated with a committee dedicated to projects incubation and set the stage for ongoing support for coalitions amongst Jewish and Muslim participants. We visited the former concentration camp of Sachsenhausen, near Berlin, where we held a transformative joint prayer. In 2016 the MJC received 150 participants from 33 countries.

## **EIGHTH ANNUAL MJC**

### **6-12 AUGUST 2017**

#### **SARAJEVO, BOSNIA & HERZEGOVINA**

Coming back to Sarajevo for the second time, a city symbolizing the hopes and struggles of our mission, was a very special experience for the MJC team. "We feel at home here," said MJC Founder Ilja Sichrovsky. Participants were comprised of approximately equal numbers of women and men and Muslims and Jews, in addition to a small group of participants identifying as "allies" (neither Jewish nor Muslim, approximately 10%). The conference was attended by 122 participants and volunteers, representing 38 countries. It was officially opened by the member of the Presidency, Bakir Izetbegovic, and supported by the Jewish and Muslim Community in Sarajevo as well as the OSCE. The committees covered topics such as "Muslim-Jewish Religious and Intellectual Exchange," "Gender and Religion: Intersectionality and Prejudice," "Power, Religion and Human Rights," and "Antisemitism, Anti-Muslim racism and Hate Speech."





## **NINTH ANNUAL MJC 12-16 DECEMBER 2018 PARIS, FRANCE**

In 2018, the Muslim Jewish Conference partnered with Connecting Actions and community activist Sharon Avraham to create a unique hub for interfaith collaboration. Through an immersive, innovative structure, combining the 9th annual Muslim Jewish Conference and the 4th Connecting Actions Symposium, a unique opportunity was created for young Muslim and Jewish multipliers to co-create initiatives. They interacted not only with each other, but also with experts in their respective fields, as well as industry leaders, using their skills and resources to support collaborative action.

The gathering focused on 4 tracks: Interfaith Projects, MJC Local Chapters, Dialogue Experts in the Connecting Actions Network, and Community and Coalition Building for artists, innovators, entrepreneurs and other free-thinkers. Participants discussed dialogue strategies, interfaith work, activism and community building.

MJC-CA 2018 incorporated many participatory principles and activities. All the content was inspired, created and led by the participants and staff before or at the conference itself, building on the outstanding work of the individuals and organizations already involved. This fostered collective intelligence, deepened community building, and created a more intimate environment.

## **TENTH ANNUAL MJC 15-21 DECEMBER 2019 VIENNA, AUSTRIA**

In 2019, the MJC hosted its 10th annual conference with a specific purpose: to gather the main actors of this movement to reflect on how far we have come and how far we can go together. The objective was to set up the stage for another successful 10 years with a consolidated team, vision and resources. The 10th Conference attendees were selected particularly carefully, handpicking the most active and inspiring allies and experts in the field as well as alumni of past Muslim Jewish Conferences. Following the MJC 10th anniversary Gala in Vienna, where the extended community and supporters of the MJC were invited to witness the accomplishments of the past decade and celebrate them together, 60 participating entrepreneurs and leaders in their fields held a strategic conference outside of Vienna for five days. Their goal was to conceptualize and co-create the architecture to transform the MJC work from a grassroots initiative into a hub for knowledge and experience as well as the development of mutual and professionally guided action and impact.



## **WE HAVE HAD MJC PARTICIPANTS FROM ALL OVER THE WORLD, INCLUDING FROM:**

Afghanistan, Albania, Algeria, Argentina, Australia, Austria, Azerbaijan, Belgium, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Brazil, Bulgaria, Canada, Chile, China, Croatia, Czech Republic, Denmark, England, Egypt, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, India, Indonesia, Israel, Italy, Irak, Iran, Jordan, Kazakhstan, Kosovo, Lebanon, Libya, Luxemburg, Mexico, Morocco, Netherlands, Pakistan, Palestine, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Saudi Arabia, Scotland, Serbia, Singapore, Slovakia, Slovenia, South Africa, Sudan, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Syria, Turkey, Tunisia, Ukraine, USA & Yemen.

# SUPPORTERS OF MJC

## PATRONAGE

- 2019 President Alexander Van der Bellen, Austria
- 2017 President Bakir Izetbegovic, Bosnia and Herzegovina
- 2016 President Frank Walter Steinmeier, Germany
- 2015 President Frank Walter Steinmeier, Germany
- 2014 President Heinz Fischer, Austria
- 2013 President Bakir Izetbegovic, Bosnia and Herzegovina
- 2010 President Heinz Fischer, Austria

## ENDORSED BY

Former U.S. President Bill Clinton

## BOARD OF ADVISORS

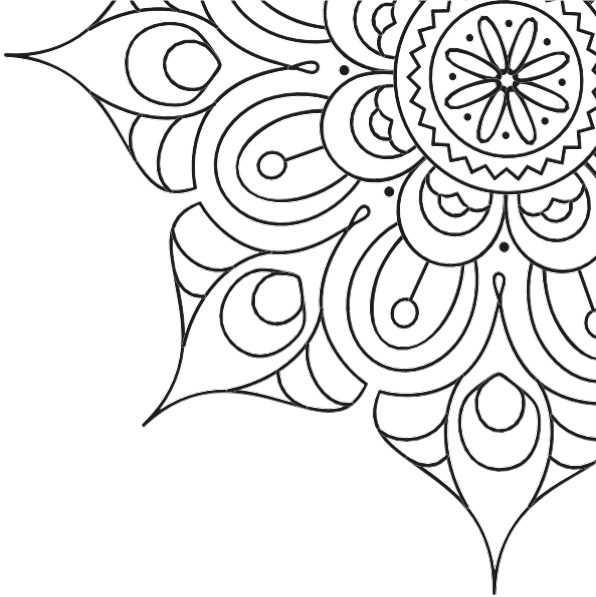
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Dr. Mustafa Cerić

Andrey Azoulay

Rabbi David Rosen

Sally A. Painter



## HONORARY COMMITTEE

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# DONORS

*The Muslim Jewish Conference has been supported in various ways by the following organizations and institutions:*

AlWaleed Philanthropies

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Blue Star Strategies

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Cafe Crossover, Vienna

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City of Vienna, Austria

Claudio and Penny Pincus Family Foundation

European Union's Right, Equality, and Citizenship Programme.

EVZ - The Federal Foundation "Memory, Responsibility and Future"

Federal Foreign Office, Germany

Federal Ministry for European and International Affairs, Austria

Guerrand-Hermes Foundation for Peace

Hommes de Parole Foundation

Impact Hub Vienna

Institute for African Sciences, University of Vienna, Austria

Institute of International Development, University of Vienna

Irving and Dorothy Rom Charitable Foundation

Jumpstart

Karl Kahane Foundation

Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs of the Slovak Republic

Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Bosnia & Herzegovina

Neni

NH Hotels

Grand Hotel, Vienna

Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR)

Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE)

Ost Club, Vienna, Austria

Riesen Film

Sine Lege Film

Stanley & Marion Bergman Family Charitable Fund

The Academy of Fine Arts and Design, Bratislava

The Jewish community in Sarajevo, Bosnia & Herzegovina

The Natan Fund

The Russell Berrie Foundation

Ukrainian Jewish Committee

UNIQA

United Nations Alliance of Civilizations

University of Vienna, Austria

US Embassy in Vienna, Austria

US Embassy in Berlin, Germany

Vienna City Hall



# THE 2021 ANNUAL MUSLIM JEWISH CONFERENCE

**TWELFTH ANNUAL MJC  
6-9 DECEMBER 2021  
GLOBAL**

## **BUILDING MUSLIM-JEWISH RESILIENCE IN CHALLENGING TIMES**

At the MJC 2021, we invited experts in interfaith and intra-religious initiatives, leaders in the fields of dialogue and conflict resolution, and MJC alumni, as well as new participants to join us at the 12th Muslim Jewish Conference. We delved into the challenges and opportunities that the COVID-19 era is creating for Muslim-Jewish cooperation, from issues of xenophobia, anti-Semitism, anti-Muslim racism, and global challenges to religious freedoms and restrictions.

Over 4 days, we invited approximately 40 participants to project incubation and skill-building workshops, thematic discussions on topics related to Jewish and Muslim relations, religious and remembrance activities, interfaith and intra-faith dialogue sessions, as well as one-on-one and small-group networking and bonding opportunities. At this year's iteration of the MJC, we asked: How can Jews and Muslims build resilience during challenging times? What role(s) can interreligious solidarity play in (re)building social cohesion?

Despite the difficulties that event-based organizations are facing in light of the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, we were able to put on a global, online conference from December 6 to December 9, 2021. It gathered participants from Jewish, Muslim and other convictional communities from countries all over the world. The conference program therefore allowed MJC participants to build local impact with those in their region or sector, as well as to incubate

ideas and projects with a resolutely global scope. We invited both participants and alumni to lead sessions for other attendees.

To mimic the relationship-building opportunities of the annual in-person MJC, participants met both collectively and in smaller "pods" in intimate breakout rooms. With a balance of conference participants with no previous interfaith experience (30%), participants with previous interfaith experience but without a current project (40%), and participants with experience and a current interfaith project (30%), this composition helped create a basis for trust-building and the ability to "transcend the screen."

## **PARTICIPANTS:**

**45% of participants identify as Muslim.**

**45% of participants identify as Jewish.**

**10% of participants identify with another religious tradition.**

**50% of participants identify as female.**

**50% of participants identify as male.**



# SCHEDULE



## DAY 1: 6 DECEMBER

**14:30** Informal check-in

**15:00** Opening session: Keynotes

*Ilja Sichrovsky*

*Salma Arif*

*Alan Dosoretz*

**15:15** Introductions and icebreaker activity

**15:45** Online conference guidelines and agenda overview

**16:10** Breakout sessions: Thematic Discussions

*Stories of discrimination*

*What you've always wanted to ask the "other," without ever daring to*

*Antisemitism, anti-Muslim racism, & the media*

**17:00** Breakout sessions: Pods

*Interfaith challenges and achievements of the past 2 years*

**18:00** Informal hangout

## DAY 2: 7 DECEMBER

**14:30** Informal check-in

**15:00** Project Presentations

*The Muslim Jewish Festival*

*The Blackburn Interfaith Forum*

*The Interfaith Tour*

**15:15** Speaker Session: Samira Fatma

*United Religions Initiative: The Model of Cooperation Circles*

**15:30** Breakout sessions: Skill-Building Workshops

*Leading difficult conversations*

*Active listening in interfaith dialogue*

*Antisemitism, anti-Muslim racism, & the media*

**16:15** Breakout sessions: Pods

*Interfaith projects ideation*

**17:00** Breakout sessions: Thematic Discussions

*Memory & remembrance*

*Why is it so difficult to talk about the Israeli/Palestinian Conflict?*

*Resilience in challenging times*

**18:00** Informal hangout

## DAY 3: 8 DECEMBER

**14:30** Informal check-in

**15:00** Project Presentations

*The Diversity Network and the Argentinian  
MJC Local Chapter*

*Connecting Actions and the European Institute  
For Dialogue*  
*Nisa-Nashim*

**15:15** **Speaker Session:** *David Wellman, Grace  
School of Applied Diplomacy at DePaul University:  
Dialogue Activists as Citizen Diplomats*

**15:30** Networking Session

**16:15** Breakout sessions: Pods

*How MJC can support alumni projects*

**17:00** Breakout sessions: Intrafaith Discussions

**18:00** Informal hangout

## DAY 4: 9 DECEMBER

**14:30** Informal check-in

**15:00** Project Presentations

*Interfaith Initiative of the Negev*  
*New Generations*  
*Faiths in Tune*

**15:15** **Speaker Session:** *Mohamed Al-Samawi,  
The Abrahamic House*

**15:30** Breakout sessions: Skill-Building Workshops

*Activism and social media engagement*  
*Storytelling and interfaith dialogue*  
*Facilitating difficult dialogue*

**17:00** Presentations

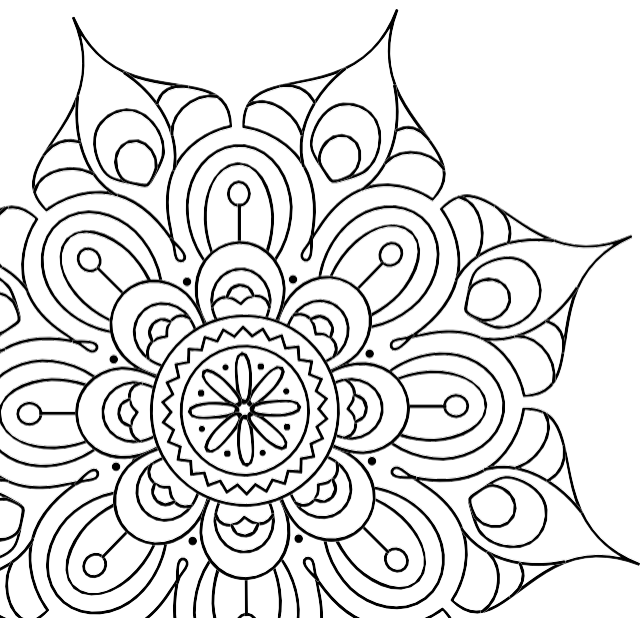
*Zachary Gallant: Book presentation*  
*Connecting Actions*

**17:30** Group Discussion

*The future of Muslim Jewish Cooperation*

**17:45** Closing session

**18:00** Artistic performance - DJ Ramzi Spinoza





# THEMATIC DISCUSSIONS

## STORIES OF DISCRIMINATION

**LED BY ALAN DOSORETZ**

Participants watch a short movie: Two people are on a train. One of them is an Arab man, being threatened by white supremacists. A phone rings, belonging to another passenger - the ringtone reveals he is Jewish. The white supremacists charge towards both the Jew and the Arab, and they confront the violence together.

There are four types of roles in events of discrimination: victim, victimizer, bystander, active intervener. It is more difficult for people to admit that they are victimizers or bystanders. And it's important to remember we don't need to be in extreme situations to start taking action, and need to ask ourselves what elements drive us to act and how.

"Part of the problem," said one participant, "is that we assume that we're supposed to be enemies, and we only become friendly when times are tough. But we just want to learn about each other."

The discussion went on to address questions including: How do we start these conversations if we don't have a common threat? Do we need incidents of anti-Muslim racism and anti-Semitism to come together? How can we become more proactive every day?

## WHAT HAVE YOU ALWAYS WANTED TO ASK THE "OTHER," WITHOUT EVER DARING TO?

Questions raised in this breakout session included:

**LED BY RAFEL TYSZBLAT**

"What makes someone a Muslim?"

"What makes someone Jewish?"

"Who is the God of the Muslims - is it the same God as for the Jews?"

Participants engaged in a lively discussion of their own definitions of and relationships to their faith; what it means to live as a Jew or as a Muslim in Europe; and the role of language - particularly Arabic and Hebrew - in their religions. When asked if they had ever been called "not Muslim enough" or "not Jewish enough," most participants raised their hands.



# MEMORY AND REMEMBRANCE

## LED BY ELIZABETH BERMAN

Discussions and contestations regarding remembrance, memory, and the commemoration of events of atrocity cut across issues of personal and political concern. In past years, the MJC has facilitated visits to sites of historical atrocity, including Babi Yar in Ukraine and Srebrenica in Bosnia and Herzegovina, to work towards interfaith commemoration, prayer, and healing and to remind one another of the necessity to fight for justice and non-violence.

Elizabeth led a dialogue about contemporary remembrance and commemoration practices, and how they affect our daily lives, our political contexts, and global discussions about violence and repair. Engaging in a discussion on memory virtually fostered a space for sharing perspectives that might feel too personal, ahistorical, or contentious to bring up at a site of historical atrocity. Participants from the UK, Israel, Germany, and the U.S. discussed questions such as: does commemoration work always benefit communities who have suffered, or do they sometimes risk conferring prestige on perpetrators that have historically caused harm? How do different experiences of suffering bump up against one another in public space, and how does this vary across different countries? How do we commemorate ongoing violence, such as border violence, as well as historical events? Sharing personal stories to back up their broader convictions allowed participants to engage with opposing viewpoints and with people who have vastly different experiences. For instance, participants discussed the complexity of feeling like a “victim” in their communities, while also supporting the impulse to “never forget.” They discussed the narratives of suffering that are crowded out by a focus on events in the past, as state actors, teachers, friends and family prefer to address bygone eras rather than the contemporary issues that surround them, and in which they may be complicit. Comparisons of violence can often be incredibly divisive both personally and politically, but this virtual exchange invited participants to engage in a controlled dialogue in order to share their feelings and ideas and to form solidarity across lines of difference.

# WHY IS IT SO DIFFICULT TO TALK ABOUT THE ISRAELI/PALESTINIAN CONFLICT

## LED BY RAFAEL TYSZBLAT

Noting that conversations around the Israeli/Palestinian conflict are often “an elephant in the room” in Muslim-Jewish spaces, Rafael asked participants to share personal connections with conversations surrounding the conflict. They shared their desires to include people identifying as Israeli and Palestinian in conversations, and their frustrations with the fact that many continued conversations on the topic seem to make no impact. In participants’ experiences, discussions of the Israeli/Palestinian conflict have challenged friendships, and many noted that some people are more reluctant than others to join in such conversations because of past traumatic experiences.

Participants shared pointers with one another for engaging in discussions on the Israeli/Palestinian conflict; for instance, avoiding engagements on social media. Participants advised having more than one facilitator present for discussions, to foster collaboration and avoid the risk of a singular or biased perspective. Distinguishing emotional reactions from physical violence is also key, for many participants; while passion may come to the fore in conversational engagements around the Israeli/Palestinian conflict, emotions are an important factor in such discussions and cannot be confused with material violence. Participants agreed that making space for the expression of emotions around the conflict is key. They also agreed that accessing information on social media, or in regions with majority representation from only one group, can lead to bias - so spaces like the MJC are vital in connecting people with different experiences.

# SKILL-BUILDING WORKSHOPS

## LEADING DIFFICULT CONVERSATIONS

### LED BY MELISSA SHAW

How do you know when you are being heard? Melissa explained the tenets of supporting healthy dialogue, inspired by The House of Shammai:

- 1) Approach with kindness and humility.
- 2) Study your own positions as well as those of the other person.
- 3) State the opposing view before your own.

Participants reacted to this list, considering: Who are you when you're really listening? What's your active listening pose? Participants practiced maintaining eye contact for 60 seconds with another participant in the Zoom gallery, before engaging in a breakout-room activity called "The Perfect Conversation." Participants met one-on-one in the breakout rooms, selecting from a list the point with which they most disagreed. (Partner A first said what they think, before partner B repeated what A said as exactly as they could. Partner B then gave their own opinion before partner A repeated 100% of what partner B said.) The breakout rooms were followed with a group reflection about how everyone felt in their breakout rooms.

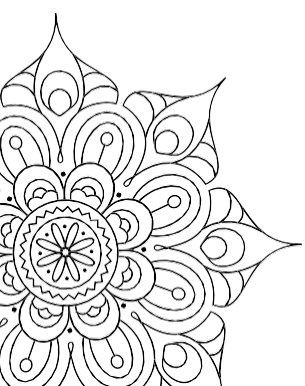
## STORYTELLING AND INTERFAITH DIALOGUE

### LED BY ZACHARY GALLANT

Zachary shared a few personal stories to provide examples of how storytelling works, and then invited participants to introduce themselves through a storytelling approach. When you tell your story, he said, you could be helping others to resonate with your story *and* to come up with their own.

When telling one's story, the most important thing is to have the listener relate and connect with it. That's the key to using storytelling as a device: to deliver your message effectively to a diverse audience. Employing storytelling in interfaith dialogue requires awareness about the topics one is bringing up: you never know which sensitivities might be triggered in others. It is always useful to find different audiences and test your story; see what they hear from you, and if you are able to deliver the message(s) that you intended. This is also the best way to practice and improve your storytelling skills.

Participants shared their personal stories about interfaith within the group, taking a further step into the practice of storytelling. What happened then was magical: one participant's story resonated deeply with others, opening a lively discussion about the powerful potential of finding common cultural customs, such as drinking tea, to open a safe space for interfaith dialogue.



# **FACILITATING DIFFICULT DIALOGUE**

## **LED BY RAFAEL TYSZBLAT**

Rafael asked: how can we, as third party moderators, facilitate difficult dialogue? In an interactive session, he introduced participants to a proven methodology to do so, whether they are moderating or engaging in a conflictual dialogue encounter.

The group first considered what constitutes conflict, noting that it can involve tension; disputing or different narratives; the unwillingness of each group to listen, accommodate or collaborate; and passion, with subjective, affective and emotional elements. Such conflicts can trigger the body's flight-or-fight response.

In dealing with such conflict, a person-centered approach is helpful: moderators of dialogue need to recognize and acknowledge the interlocutors' emotions first. Telling participants to "calm down!" negates their emotions, engendering a sense of threat. Making space for self-determination is also key; the answers will come from the participants, not from the moderator. Other ground rules include establishing confidentiality, non-judgement; and sharing airtime. The moderator does not give advice, but rather tries to reflect what the participants are saying and help them come up with a solution. The moderator should enable and empower participants themselves to bring solutions to their conflicts themselves.

When engaging in a difficult dialogue as a participant, it is important to speak for yourself instead of purporting to represent a group; avoid making generalizations with "we" or "they" statements, instead speaking with "I" statements. Endeavor to foster not only a "safe" space free of personal attacks, as well as a "brave" space, one in which people can learn together and participants can make mistakes and confront them together. Participants and moderators alike should reflect back what they're hearing from their interlocutors, draw meaning through asking questions, and strive for synthesis.

Dialogue is distinguished from debate in that the former invites learning as opposed to confrontation; no one "wins" or "loses" a dialogue. Participants were interested in how dialogue can occur between one person who represents an oppressed group and another person who does not. Rafael noted that dialogue is never blind to power structures - it is in dialogue that these can be best addressed, particularly through discussions of personal experiences and history, awareness of and adjustments to how much space each participant is taking, and combining an emotional and analytical approach.

# **ACTIVE LISTENING IN INTERFAITH DIALOGUE**

## **LED BY MOHAMED TRIKI JOUINI**

After personal and professional introductions from participants, Mohamed delineated the differences between dialogue and other modes of engagement, such as conversation, discussion, and debate. Dialogue is about building a deep connection with one's interlocutor; it is more about listening to and understanding the other's perspective and bridging different perspectives, rather than crafting a response to the other's ideas. Practicing "active listening" helps to avoid judgment and for those in a conversation to see things from the other's perspective. Active listening can provide therapeutic effects for those who feel they need to be heard, as well as promote problem-solving. Active listening is characterized by listening rather than talking, exercising full concentration, and interacting by asking for questions or clarifications, and working to summarize or formulate the other's statements in one's own words. Participants expressed a desire to keep these notes in mind during their dialogues.

# ALUMNI PROJECT AND LOCAL CHAPTER PRESENTATIONS

## MISSION

In order to take home and bring to life the vision of the MJC worldwide, notable alumni of the MJC are invited to engage in collaborative projects which were incubated and inspired during their respective MJC experience over the last ten years.

The goal is to enable, encourage and support cross-cultural initiatives to provide young drivers of change with a framework for establishing vital connections and joint action, through the exchange of knowledge, ideas, and experiences.

## APPROACH

One of the main roles the MJC has fulfilled in previous years is that of a project incubator. During the Muslim Jewish Conference and during local meetings by alumni, countless project ideas were born and incubated.

## THE MUSLIM JEWISH FESTIVAL GERMANY

**DENNIS KIRSCHBAUM** presented on the Muslim Jewish Festival, or “MuJew Festival,” which took place in Berlin from 11-14 November 2021. With the motto “Art united - Muslim-Jewish voices,” the MuJew Festival complemented the diverse program of the Germany-wide celebration “1700 Years of Jewish Life in Germany.” Over four days, visitors could expect eleven events and around 50 different performances ranging from music, dance, poetry, theatre, film screenings to exciting panel discussions. The social, academic and artistic achievements of Jewish people are an integral part of the history of Berlin, and Muslim people have also been enriching these fields for over 60 years. Berlin is the most diverse city in all of Germany; people from over 190 nations have found their home there. Amid rising antisemitism and anti-Muslim racism, the MuJew Festival showed visitors that Jewish and Muslim lives have their place in this city: they are here, and at the same time queer, feminist, anti-racist, religious, or secular. The festival was an invitation to all Berliners to get to know the various realities of life in the city and to enjoy the Muslim and Jewish life that surrounds them. The MuJew Festival 2021 counted 750 visitors from all over Germany and was live streaming online.

## THE DIVERSITY NETWORK AND THE ARGENTINIAN LOCAL MJC CHAPTER ARGENTINA

**MELODY KHALIL** and **BARBARA ZEIFER** presented on The Diversity Network and the Argentinian Local Chapter of MJC. They have worked with the local parliament of Buenos Aires, with the goal of convening young people from the three Abrahamic religions. Participants include mostly students and post-graduates, with many people meeting each other for the first time to learn about each other’s faith traditions, discuss the Israeli/Palestinian conflict, and network with one another. The week before the conference, they hosted a lunch and networking session in Buenos Aires for local Jews and Muslims aged 18-24.

# CONNECTING ACTIONS AND THE EUROPEAN INSTITUTE FOR DIALOGUE FRANCE

**RAFAEL TYSZBLAT** presented on Connecting Actions, a French non-profit that was initiated at the Muslim Jewish Conference with the objective to reinforce the field of interfaith, intercultural, and interconvictional citizen dialogue. Since 2015, Connecting Actions has promoted and implemented dialogue to build bridges across multiple divides and empower bridge builders to do their work more effectively.

In 2018, twelve European Civil Society Organizations were convened by Connecting Actions to launch the European Institute for Dialogue. This ambitious coalition gathers and supports local, national and European organizations fighting hate, ignorance, prejudice, racism and discrimination through constructive conversations and activities between members of various identity groups. Today, Connecting Actions and its partners continue to lead this effort to enhance the field of interfaith and intercultural dialogue and cooperation, by bringing together its main stakeholders around common projects and professionalizing the field through ongoing training and evaluation.

In a world beset by crises, advocacy is certainly valuable in many contexts, but it is also obvious to most bridge-builders that the practice of dialogue can and should be better considered as a tool for social change. It is crucial to ensure that dialogue “does no harm,” and tackles societal problems by empowering participants to learn from one other, from interactions, and from themselves. When done right, dialogue helps participants to shift their attitudes towards each other *and* towards the idea and practice of dialogue itself.

## NISA-NASHIM UNITED KINGDOM

**ELIZABETH ARIF-FEAR** presented on Nisa-Nashim, a Britain-based network that since 2015 has brought Jewish and Muslim women together to inspire and lead social change. It creates positive experiences for, and understanding about, people from different backgrounds – particularly Jews and Muslims. Their local groups, coupled with strategic partnerships, provide a unique voice when advising government bodies, policymakers and others, on how to promote social cohesion. Nisa-Nashim believes in the ability of women and faith groups to build cohesion and positive change, the corrosive nature of prejudice against ‘Outsider’ groups, and above all, the need to celebrate similarity whilst recognising difference. Nisa-Nashim recently held a meet-up in London, which included a social action photography project, delivering gifts to refugee families, and a book club to facilitate conversations. Inevitably, emotional conversations - such as around the Israeli/Palestinian conflict - emerge, and the organization presents an opportunity to confront difficult questions. Throughout the pandemic, Nisa-Nashim’s core values of solidarity, inclusivity, and sisterhood have promoted wellbeing among and beyond members.





## THE INTERFAITH TOUR

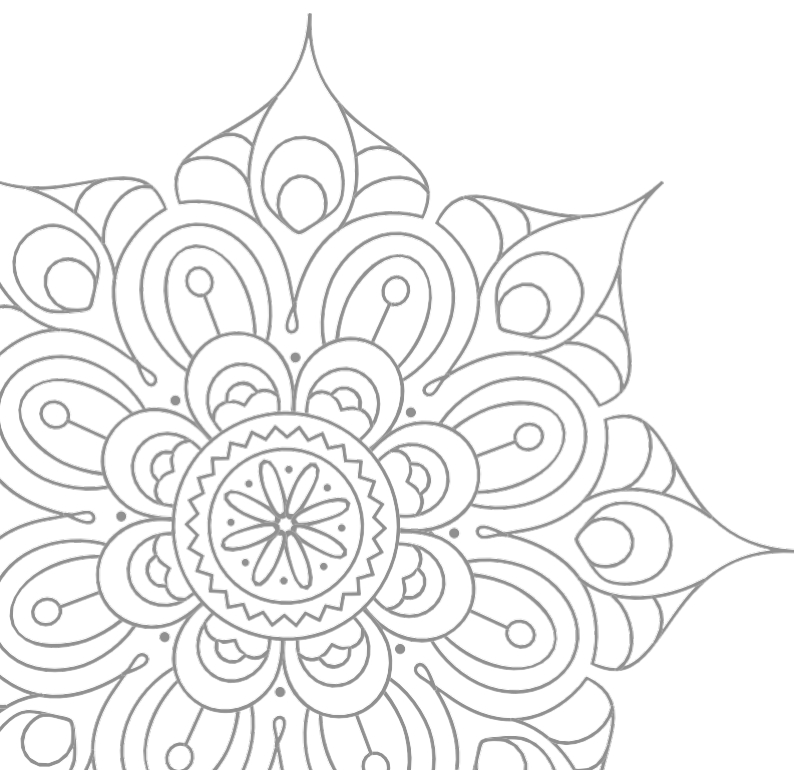
### FRANCE

**RADIA BAKKOUCH** presented on the Interfaith Tour, a France-based interfaith initiative. Since 2013, participants have visited 95 countries and met 1200 peacebuilders across the globe. The objectives of the Interfaith Tour are as follows: to inspire young people and encourage them to become agents of change by creating and promoting positive content on social cohesion; to document the role of interfaith initiatives to promote coexistence and combat intolerance by producing and mapping quantitative and qualitative data through conducting interviews; and to provide tools for educators through on-the-ground research training materials to prevent and combat hate speech, racism and discrimination. The Interfaith Tour is currently on the fifth edition of its global tour, led by four Jewish, Muslim, Christian and secular leaders, which started in October 2021. The four women leaders of this Interfaith Tour are committed to promoting their trajectories that can in turn inspire thousands of young women and empower them to act. After visiting and researching large and small initiatives worldwide, the InterFaith Tour will bring their impact to Europe. The organizations visited are as diverse as an Interfaith Football Club, anti-racist Black organizations in the United States and Jamaica, and a Fijian initiative that fights violence against women through interfaith theater productions.

## THE BLACKBURN INTERFAITH FORUM

### UNITED KINGDOM

**PARIN BEGUM** presented on the Interfaith Forum of Blackburn with Darwen, a town in Lancashire, Northwest England that boasts incredible religious diversity for its relatively small size. The Interfaith Forum fosters understanding and cooperation between the faith communities in Blackburn with Darwen and improves the quality of life of local people. They aim to do this by working together on agreed projects in order to demonstrate a commitment to working in partnership between people of different faiths, which include Christianity, Islam, Hinduism, Sikhism, Buddhism, and Judaism. The Interfaith Forum works together to: advance public knowledge and mutual understanding of the teachings, traditions and practices of the different faith communities in Blackburn with Darwen; to celebrate the different and distinctive features of each faith and increase understanding of the positive role that the faith communities can play in society; and to promote working together on common ground and good relations between people of different faiths and no faith.



## **INTERFAITH INITIATIVE OF THE NEGEV ISRAEL**

**MIJAELEVEN DAVID** presented on the Interfaith Initiative of the Negev, an organization based in Bersheva and consisting of rabbis, sheikhs and Christian ministers. They come together to work on local issues and learn about each other's religions to understand one another and help the community. They visit children's centers to reach children who have never spoken to the 'Other' before; deliver seminars on prayers based on the respective religions; hold Iftar meals; organize women-only encounters; discuss LGBTQ issues; and address issues specific to the Negev, such as anti-Bedouin sentiment. The group works to promote religion as a solution to, and not a cause of, conflict.

## **FAITHS IN TUNE UNITED KINGDOM**

**ANJA FAHLENKAMP** presented on Faiths in Tune, an initiative she began during her time in university in the UK nearly a decade ago. Very quickly, the Faiths in Tune festivals grew beyond the university walls (as well as beyond London and the UK) to become a regular forum for religious communities and music lovers. Music can complement and enrich verbal dialogue formats by serving as an icebreaker, as a tool to build sympathy and raise interest, as a facilitator for trust, vulnerability and safe spaces, as well as a vehicle for non-verbal communication. Faiths in Tune makes visible and empowers all participating communities, including small or marginalized communities that are not usually afforded a space at other dialogue forums. In addition, each community stands at equal height on the same stage, curating its own contribution to the programme without having to fit into an imposed agenda. This, in a neutral, non-religious venue, allows the participating communities to engage with each other at an equal level, achieving true ownership of the jointly-created festival, and avoiding hierarchies or the hegemony of any one particular group. Over the years, Faiths in Tune festivals have shown that music is an effective tool to foster a more inclusive and sustainable dialogue. The success of this model is apparent in the rapid expansion of the Faiths in Tune movement, with festivals and music events in the UK (London, Birmingham), Germany (Berlin, Cologne, Dresden, Lindau) and Italy (Turin), as well as fruitful cooperation with renowned interfaith institutions and networks including Religions for Peace, the G20 Interfaith Forum, KAICIID and Dialogue Perspectives.

## **NEW GENERATIONS ARGENTINA**

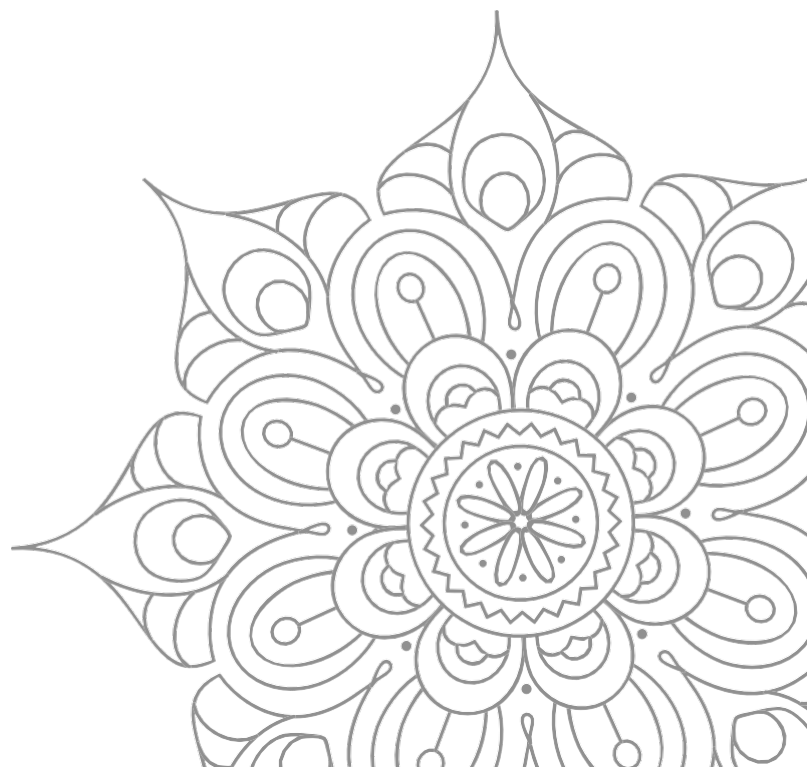
**ELIAHU CARVAJAL** presented on New Generations, an Argentina-based organization that promotes the involvement of young Jews in diplomacy and current affairs. Led by Eliahu, a Rabbi, the organization is an affiliate of the Latin American Jewish Congress and the World Jewish Congress.

## LOCAL CHAPTER INCUBATION

Although the programming of the Conference was designed to be held online, the MJC participants were encouraged to explore the possibilities to organize local hubs during the week of the conference. In that sense, a group of participants based in Germany managed to meet in person. Almost one month after the MuJew festival concluded, and in alignment with the invitation of the MJC Team to create hybrid dynamics, a group of volunteers and staff members who participated in the Festival organized an in-person hub in Berlin during the MJC Conference days. The main goal of joining the online Conference being at the same physical location was to create the proper conditions to take Muslim-Jewish cooperation in Germany to the next level. Following the creative and cooperative interactions built during the in-person hub in Berlin, this location was selected to receive incubation mentorship after the Conference, with help from the MJC's roster of skilled activists, experienced educators, and strong links in this urban epicenter of interfaith and intercultural dialogue. In cooperation with the MJCCH consortium member JUMA, the Berlin local chapter will start designing and developing educational activities, skill building workshops in interfaith and intercultural encounters, as well as dialogue groups fostering the Muslim-Jewish cooperation at the German local level.

## ALUMNI PROJECT INCUBATION

A group of notable MJC alumni, who have made use of the MJC experience to implement local-level projects, presented their ongoing projects to inspire and initiate ongoing contact with new MJC participants. In addition, within their pods sessions, participants envisioned new ideas and incubated new projects to address specific challenges in their faith communities and local communities. Participants had the opportunity to hold one-on-one meetings, or brain-dates, with one another during the Conference to further build community, share knowledge, and co-create impact. One month after the 2021 Conference concluded, the MJC team launched a call for alumni projects incubation. This call was a formal and exclusive invitation for the Conference participants to follow-up on the impact and process that they started during the MJC21. The MJC team already received several alumni project proposals and has started the evaluation process.



# SPEAKERS

**DAVID WELLMAN,**

**GRACE SCHOOL OF APPLIED DIPLOMACY AT DEPAUL UNIVERSITY, USA**

**“DIALOGUE ACTIVISTS AS CITIZEN DIPLOMATS”**

David discussed why he considers MJC a prime example of multilateral, transprofessional, citizen diplomacy.

When the words “diplomat” or “diplomacy” are broached in a conversation, most people immediately – and often exclusively – think of members of a nation-state diplomatic service, and for good reason. The title of diplomat has long been associated almost entirely with an elite group of people, who practice a craft rooted in a profession, which was historically represented by members of the nobility. For this reason, many who travel in activist circles often do not look favorably on this designation and those to whom it is most often attributed. However, we should expand our definition of what we consider to be a diplomat, and to see that in fact what we at the MJC are doing is a most vital form of diplomacy. This reflects what the scholar of diplomacy Costas Constantinou describes as *everyday diplomacy*, when he writes: “diplomacy can be broadly understood to emerge whenever someone successfully claims to represent and negotiate for a territory or a group of people or a cause or successfully claims to mediate between others engaging in such representations and negotiations. In this quotidian, diplomacy ceases to be a professional skill or special technique and thus captures a wider spectrum of social activities.” This is what is coming to be known as the *democratization of diplomacy*, and this new understanding has in David’s estimation not come a moment too soon, for the world we live in is in desperate need of more people understanding themselves as practitioners of diplomacy.

As we watch the accelerated growth of divides between people, of suspicion of those who are seen as “Other” by dominant groups, or the leveraging of such fear on the part of those who see the promotion of such divisions as a political opportunity to secure power, it is increasingly apparent that such efforts to promote dialogue and bridge-building cannot be limited to those who are already ideologically predisposed to doing such work. We need to reach a broader cross section of people and invite them into these efforts, and we need to do it as soon as possible.

Citizen Diplomacy opens the door to the possibility of embracing diplomacy in its most idealized form: as a means entirely devoted to the prevention of conflict, the reduction of violence, the work of peacebuilding, the healing of rifts, the dissolution of false perceptions and the building of bridges across multiple boundaries of difference. So why is it important for the members of groups such as the Muslim Jewish Conference to see themselves not only as activists, community organizers, or practitioners of dialogue, but also as diplomats? Because it is through claiming this title – or at least feeling comfortable when others use it – that one learns to value their work and what they bring to the table even more than they already do, and in turn to invite a broader audience to do the same, with an eye to working on a much larger scale than ever before. David’s invitation for such people to name themselves as diplomats is not intended as a means of gaining prestige, but rather as way to connect what they do to a bigger project – one that is central to so many things he believes most people value.

## **PARTICIPANTS’ FEEDBACK:**

**“VERY INSPIRING!”**

**“REALLY LOVED WHAT YOU SHARED, DAVID!”**

# MOHAMMED AL SAMAWI

## THE ABRAHAMIC HOUSE, USA

### “INTERFAITH DIALOGUE CAN SAVE LIVES”

For Mohammed Al Samawi, an author and founder of The Abrahamic House, attending MJC gave him the opportunity to do his interfaith work on a bigger scale. For this reason, the MJC community and mission is dear to his heart. The MJC was instrumental in igniting Mohammed’s interfaith activism and in getting him safely from Yemen to the United States.

“First of all, it’s a bit emotional for me to be here today,” said Mohammed. “I would like to start speaking to you today by sharing that MJC opened my eyes: the first time in my life that I met a Jewish person face to face was actually through MJC. And I had a lot of stereotypes against Jews, I didn’t know what to expect in that MJC Conference held in Bosnia in 2013. I remember the first Jew that I met through MJC: he was not only a Jew, he was a Jew, Israeli and Gay. It was like three in one for me, and it was an amazing experience. I remember that I learned not only about the Jewish community but also about the Muslim community. I learned more about my own community.”

“I am originally from Yemen, and back there I had been taught a certain way of Islam. So for example, I never thought that Muslim gays ever exist, and it was an amazing, amazing experience again to be in Bosnia and to meet through MJC, Muslims who are proudly Muslims but they were also proud members of the LGBTQ community. And that is an amazing experience for me that opened my eyes.”

“Because of the interfaith work I was doing both before and after MJC, my life was at risk in Yemen, and some people also from MJC they were able to help me out to escape and I came to the United States. When I came to the United States, I was so amazed by the freedom of religion: that you can actually do interfaith without being afraid that an extremist group will come to kill you. So I opened up the the Abrahamic House.”

The Abrahamic House is a US-based, multifaith incubator for social change built on the mission of #Gathering and not #Othering. An Abrahamic House is a co-living, co-learning, and co-creating space to connect, pray, organize, and serve - a personal and professional home for Muslim, Jewish, Baha’i and Christian emerging leaders in cities across the United States impacted by hate or violence. Four Abrahamic House fellows share a living and working space for 1-2 years, during which they are responsible for developing and executing innovative community engagement programs committed to broad-based solidarity for folks of all religions, gender expressions, racial backgrounds, and sexualities. There are currently two Abrahamic Houses in the U.S. - one in Los Angeles and one in Washington, D.C.

“Living and being in that house is just an experience by itself, and we want to encourage the fellows just to be who they are, and do events to speak about it,” said Mohammed. “Last week we had a Chanukah party and it was amazing. My dream is to have Abrahamic Houses all around the United States, and hopefully even to have houses outside the US - we already received requests to open Abrahamic houses in France and Germany!”

**“I WANT TO SAY THANK YOU, MJC - EVERYTHING THAT CHANGED MY LIFE IS ACTUALLY BECAUSE OF THE CONFERENCE... THE FACT THAT MJC IS STILL WORKING IN THIS AMAZING WAY IS REALLY POWERFUL.”**

# IMPACT ON PARTICIPANTS:

## THE SURVEY

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**80%** of surveyed participants were motivated by the MJC to challenge someone about stereotypes they hold about people from other religions and beliefs.

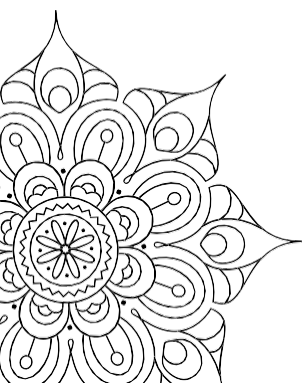
**91%** of surveyed participants would highly recommend this event to colleagues, friends, and/or community members.

**91%** of surveyed participants said that the MJC motivated them to engage more with people from other faiths and beliefs.

**85%** of surveyed participants expressed that participating in the MJC improved their perceptions of people from other faiths and beliefs.

**93%** of surveyed participants are hopeful that a strong relationship between Muslims and Jews is possible.

**100%** of surveyed participants were glad to have participated in the MJC, and would like to participate in further events of the MJC (including the next in-person Annual Conference!)





## WHAT PARTICIPANTS SAID ABOUT THEIR EXPERIENCES:

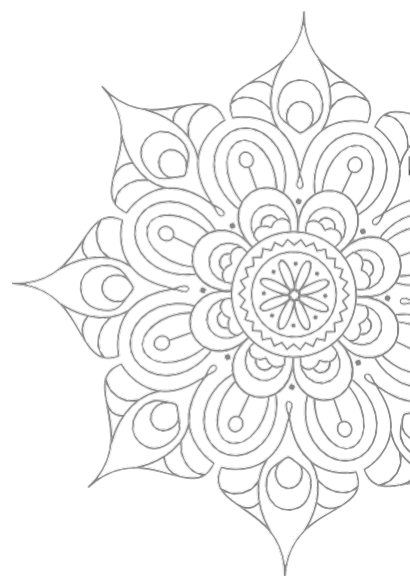
“This event has definitely changed my perspective about the Jewish community and how both Muslim and Jewish communities can work together in harbouring a strong relationship of tolerance, harmony and acceptance.”

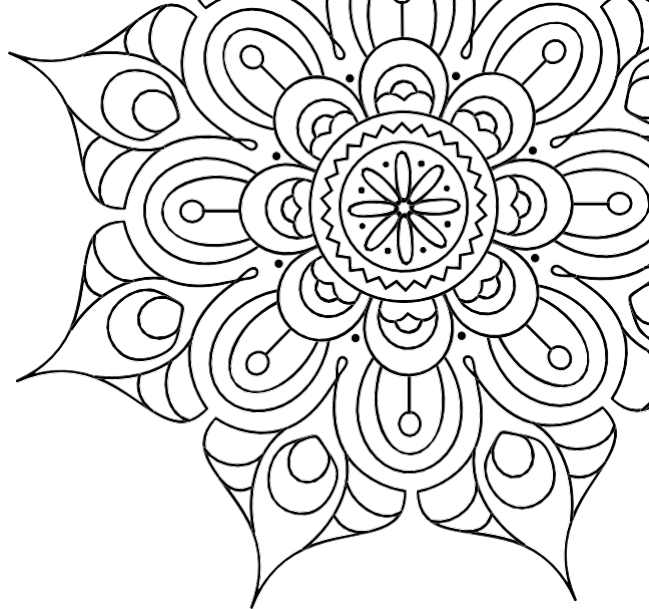
“I was under the impression that participants from the Jewish community would be a little hostile and hesitant in creating a dialogue with Muslim participants but after attending Day 1, I realized this was one of my misconceptions. The media’s portrayal of the inter-communication is false and there are so many similarities between the two communities.”

“I think facilitators did a great job given the (online) circumstances. That was one of the first things that got my attention about MJC as a first-time participant. Thank you!”

“I feel like there was a lot of emphasis on the networking and the projects, which I really appreciated.”

“The MJC exceeded my expectations and I look forward to future involvement!”





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