



MJC 2015

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## Letter from the Secretary General

Governments and philanthropies spend enormous amounts of time and money on programs to fight racism and anti-Semitism through laws, Internet control, and education. Despite the importance of this work, the proportion spent to support on-the-ground work by Civil Society Organizations is hardly sufficient. Yet it is often the CSOs that are fighting to proactively prevent intolerance.

Civil Society Organizations have the ability to reach every member of our societies. But in order to be sustainable and have effective impact, governments need to allot their support more appropriately. As the young leaders of tomorrow know, dialogue and mutual collaboration are some of the best ways to prevent racism and other societal plagues. We believe that the system we have established at the Muslim Jewish Conference, led by the next generation of leaders, is working.

Yet to create situations in which united Muslim and Jewish voices speak out against anti-Semitism and anti-Muslim racism - publicly - crucial steps remain to be taken. Together we must:

- Build Trust;
- Find language to communicate respectfully;
- Sensitize and educate young community leaders;
- Call our leaders to joint action
- Share tools and methodologies
- Support sustainable efforts over the long-term;
- Enable, strengthen and empower independent grassroots organizations.

The Muslim Jewish Conference was founded in 2010 in response to the problems that both of our communities face, particularly anti-Semitism and anti-Muslim bias and hatred.



Since the first MJC in 2010, we have gathered more than 600 young Jewish and Muslim global leaders for dialogue, grassroots coalition building, and friendship.

MJC participants have been at the forefront of issues in their communities. They are directors of local and national NGOs; civil, human and women's rights activists; academics; emerging business leaders; policymakers; humanitarian aid workers; spiritual leaders; journalists; community and university leaders. Most importantly – they have become family.

As the years have passed, we have expanded our focus and become a project incubator, working closely with our alumni to develop grassroots initiatives in their home communities on topics related to peace-building, improving interfaith relations, fighting racism and other issues of mutual concern. MJC functions as both a dialogue platform and hub for project development, and we have sparked transformative change that has impacted thousands of individuals across the globe. We at the Muslim Jewish Conference believe we are implementing the right strategy and using the right tools. Today, alumni are keeping in touch with us, and reaching out in times of strife. They are helping each other to fight against intolerance from all directions. In sum, they are not only transformed, they have become agents of positive change. Conference participants, who belong to all faiths and affiliations, work together to develop and implement projects focused on promoting interfaith and cross-cultural dialogue.

With discernment and determination, this is what hundreds of Muslims and Jews have recently since the refugee crisis was at its peak last summer: drawing from the pool of resources and skills within MJC's alumni and volunteers, we were able to intervene swiftly and with good intelligence addressing the urgent needs of people crossing our borders. Through a jointly created Facebook group and website we were able to connect action and direct the many who wanted to help to those who knew where help was needed.

When Muslims and Jews risk their reputations in their home communities - and sometimes even more - in order to create dialogue cafes and initiatives on the ground, Muslim Jewish cookbooks and calendars, Facebook groups with thousands of members that share information in mutual respect; when Jews and Muslims produce movies, exhibitions and art projects about the history of their communities saving each other's lives in times of need; when they co-create toolkits embedded within their diverse national contexts; when Jews and Muslims, leaders of today and tomorrow, mourn together at Babi Yar, at Srebrenica, at Mauthausen, and share one another's pain; when they come together in the middle of the recent Gaza crisis in order to have at least one meaningful exchange with the other side; when students go on to become the presidents of Jewish and Muslim youth and student organizations; when a small art piece, drawn by an MJC alumni in the aftermath of Paris reaches 25.000 people over social media with a message of unity in times of online hate and confrontation; when 140 change-makers from more than 50 countries come to the Muslim Jewish

Conference to talk to each other instead of about each other because it is the only place where they are able... In such circumstances, interfaith and intercultural dialogue between young leaders of today needs to be taken seriously as a crucial tool for prevention of hate crimes and racism, as much as security institutions are tools.

These joint projects, which come out of the conference and are initiated off the radar in so many places across Europe and across the world, are just the tip of the iceberg of what is possible. They need to be supported and multiplied. By making a serious effort to empower volunteer-run initiatives and organizations, enabling civil society to exchange, connect, share experiences and effectively coordinate, government and philanthropic support can have real effects on the ground, giving life to the idea that we all agree on: the establishment of innovative and effective networks of cooperation.

In every other area of importance today, a tradition of sharing best practices is common and vital for the field to succeed and develop. In our world most organizations actively working on these issues struggle to survive. The Muslim Jewish Conference has therefore initiated a first-of-its-kind meeting focusing on connecting action. In December we brought together 5 of the leading organizations in this field in order to set a joint agenda, and to exchange experiences and challenges. The diverse expertise these practitioners brought together is a starting point.

This work needs more expertise and seasoned facilitators. Unfortunately,

interfaith and cross-cultural dialogue cannot be adequately taught in a university alone. We must learn it by doing it. We are so incredibly lucky today that all over Europe and around the globe, determined and fearless individuals have taken up these challenges and have slowly become experts by learning from their mistakes and victories along the way. But these activists are also thinking of starting families at some point in their life, or want to be able to pay into pension plans. Let's give them the means and financial support to train and educate subsequent generations of European and world citizens. Give them time, give them safe spaces, give them know-how, give them a perspective on their potential impact. Encourage and implement the ground-breaking projects that they co-produce, and I guarantee you, the progress we see at MJC can be multiplied exponentially.

We are creating the vaccine for a world of misconceptions and hatred. Just a small injection into society, using the right carriers, will immunize us for generations to come.

We at The Muslim Jewish Conference aim to soon grow into a *Muslim Jewish Agency*, providing expertise on Muslim-Jewish relations as well as building a network for other interfaith institutions. Most critically, the Muslim Jewish Agency would give alumni and participants of our worldwide conferences the network and resources to sustainably develop and implement their projects.

We remain relatively few, but already we are building connections between fantastic organizations that in many cases have gathered decades of experience.

We know we are fighting an uphill battle, outnumbered and still poorly organized. With the current increase in refugees spreading over Europe it will be ever more important to strengthen local projects and to connect them to wider networks with experience and financial support. Then and only then can we have a long-lasting impact on the ground, and change the world for the better.

We need to understand that the risks of supporting grassroots initiatives and organizations, though they might not always succeed with their efforts and daring ideas, are insignificant compared to the risks of not doing enough.

Sincerely,



Ilja Sichrovsky



# The Organization

## About MJC

The Muslim Jewish Conference (MJC) is a grassroots dialogue and leadership organization that focuses on building sustainable networks between future 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.

MJC has hosted six annual conferences over the last six years in Vienna, Austria (2010, 2014); Kiev, Ukraine (2011); Bratislava, Slovakia (2012); Sarajevo, Bosnia (2013); and Berlin, Germany (2015). Since our first conference in 2010, we have gathered more than 600 young Jewish and Muslim leaders for dialogue, grassroots coalition building, and, most importantly, friendship. Participants have hailed from all corners of the globe: from throughout Europe, the Middle East, Central and South Asia, North and South America, and North and Sub-Saharan Africa. Over 50 countries have been represented. Although young, our participants have been at the forefront of addressing the major issues of their generation: they are directors of local and national NGOs; civil, human and women's rights activists; academics; emerging

business leaders; government policymakers; humanitarian aid workers; spiritual leaders; journalists; and community leaders.

## The Vision

Not long ago, our vision of bringing together hundreds of young Muslim and Jewish leaders from around the world to learn from each other, build long-lasting relationships and challenge the long-held misconceptions, stereotypes, and fears that have plagued our peoples was just that: *a vision*. But through the help of our generous supporters and our dynamic team of volunteers, we are proud to report that this vision has become reality for the fifth time.

As the years have passed, we have expanded our focus and have become a project incubator, working with our alumni to develop grassroots initiatives in their home communities on topics related to peace-building, improving interfaith relations, and other issues of mutual concern.

Our dual model as a dialogue platform and a project incubator has allowed us to spark transformative change extending much longer than a single week and affecting far more individuals than only those who attend our conference.

As we move into our next five years, we continue to identify new ways to mobilize young Jewish and Muslim leaders to maximize our impact in communities



around the world. The MJC will continue to host its annual interfaith gathering, strengthening its role as a respected center of expertise and a main platform of contact for Muslim-Jewish international and innovative networks of cooperation and conflict resolution, grassroots driven by the next generation of leaders, activists and entrepreneurs.

The Muslim Jewish Conference aims to grow into a Muslim Jewish Agency (MJA), organizing several conferences and meetings throughout the year for communities, institutions, and academics, and serving as a convener and nexus for other interfaith institutions, in order to have a long lasting impact on the ground, and to change the world as we know it.

## Previous Conferences

### First annual MJC | August 1-6, 2010 | Vienna, Austria



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

### Second Annual MJC | July 3-8, 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 anti-Semitism and anti-Muslim hatred, sustainable dialogue, and historical narratives. MJC 2011 came under the official patronage of Russell Simmons and Rabbi Marc Schneier of the Foundation for Ethnic Understanding. Nine projects were created and are currently in different stages of implementation.

### Third Annual MJC | July 9-13, 2012 | Bratislava, Slovakia





In 2012, 100 participants divided into four committees and developed more than ten projects which are being 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 | June 30 - July 5, 2013 | Sarajevo, Bosnia & Herzegovina



The fourth conference was held, for the predominantly Muslim country. Under the patronage of the Bosniak 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 | August 7-14, 2014 | Vienna, Austria



For its 5th anniversary, the conference returned to Vienna, where it all had started, and gathered 140 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 the conflict in Israel and Palestine was discussed passionately but respectfully. Islamophobia and anti-Semitism in the Media, Rights of Religious Minorities, Historical Narratives and Identity, Gender and Religion, Art 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 alike who were killed there.

### Applicants and Participants

MJC received 340 applications – the highest ever response since the conference began six years ago. In 2015, MJC welcomed 120 participants and 35 team members from 45 countries.



## Official Support

### Patron

Dr. Frank-Walter Steinmeier, Minister of Foreign Affairs, Germany

### Board of Advisors

Ambassador Jacob Finci  
Dr. Mustafa Cerić  
Andrey Azoulay  
Rabbi David Rosen  
Sally A. Painter

### Honorary Committee

Wolfgang Petritsch  
Jeremiah Baronberg

Ambassador Nedžad S. Hadžimusić  
Adnan Hasić  
Mag. Dr. Jameleddine Ben Abdeljelil  
Rabbi Andrew Baker  
Timna Brauer  
Eduard Dolinsky  
Rafi Elul  
Aleksandr Feldman  
Dipl. Ing. Dr. Franz Fischler  
Prof. Eveline Goodman-Thau  
Josef Hader,  
André Heller,  
Dr. Michael Häupl,  
Ibrahim Issa,  
Dr. Peter Jankowitsch  
Patricia Kahane  
Abbas Khider

Sebastian Kurz  
 Dr. Alois Mock  
 Susanne Scholl  
 Dr. Zeynep Taluy-Grossruck  
 Dr. Alexander Van der Bellen  
 Dr. Josef Ostermayer

## Organizations

American University in Bosnia and Herzegovina  
 Austrian Agency for International Cooperation in Education and Research  
 Blue Star Strategies  
 Bratislava International School of Liberal Arts, Slovakia  
 Bruno Kreisky Forum, Vienna  
 Cafe Crossover, Vienna  
 City of Bratislava, Slovakia  
 City of Vienna, Austria  
 Claudio & Penny Pincus  
 Daniel Pincus  
 Federal Ministry for European and International Affairs, Austria  
 Guerrard-Hermes Foundation for Peace  
 Hommes de Parole Foundation, Geneva, Switzerland  
 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  
 Neni  
 NH Hotels  
 Grand Hotel, Vienna  
 Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OECD)  
 Ost Club, Vienna, Austria  
 Sine Lege Film, Vienna, Austria  
 Stanley & Marion Bergman Family Charitable Fund  
 The Academy of Fine Arts and Design Bratislava, Slovakia  
 The Jewish community in Sarajevo, Bosnia  
 Ukrainian Jewish Committee  
 United Nations Alliance of Civilizations  
 University of Vienna, Austria  
 US Embassy in Vienna  
 Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Germany  
 EVZ Foundation, Germany  
 US Embassy in Berlin, Germany





## Words of Support



*"This organization (MJC) has responded to the call, having grown to include members from nearly forty countries from all over the world. Under the leadership of founder Ilja Sichrovsky, the commitment of your volunteers and the success of your grassroots movement has been an inspiration for all who endeavor for a politics of dignity and mutual respect."*

**Bill Clinton, Former President of the United States (1993-2001)**



*"At the MJC, young Muslim and Jewish leaders have a unique opportunity to discuss issues affecting their communities and work together towards solving them. These open dialogues are critical for creating a peaceful future."*

**Sally A. Painter, Co-Founder and Chief Operating Officer at Blue Star Strategies, LLC and Former Advisor to President Bill Clinton**



*"Change is possible only through dialogue and that is the aim of the Muslim Jewish Conference."*

**Bakir Izetbegovic, Bosniak Member of the Presidency of Bosnia and Herzegovina (2010 to date)**



*"The 2014 Muslim Jewish Conference took place in Vienna under my patronage. I wish this year's conference in Berlin every success in fostering dialogue and mutual understanding."*

**Heinz Fischer, Federal President of the Republic of Austria (2004 to date)**



*"Antisemitism and Islamophobia are two sides of the same coin. At MJC they fight this menace together, for a better future of the next generation."*

**Jakob Finci, Co-Founder and President of the Inter-Religious Council of Bosnia and Herzegovina (1997 to date)**

# The Conference

## Overview

As global tension rose following the rise of ISIS, shootings in Paris and Denmark, and the beginnings of an historical refugee crisis, 140 young leaders defied stereotypes by deciding to travel thousands of kilometers from across the world to Berlin, where they engaged in respectful discussion, established bridges of mutual understanding, and developed global networks of support and activism. In a city with a complex legacy of hate and healing, under the patronage of German Minister of Foreign Affairs, Frank-Walter Steinmeier, the attendees stood out by confronting the divisiveness of our past and present, and showed the world that dialogue is not just possible, but that it has never been more necessary.

The conflict in Israel and Palestine was discussed passionately but respectfully; war and human suffering in Syria and elsewhere were analyzed thoughtfully; and religious and political divisions were debated with passion, but productively. The goals were set high, not only to break down stereotypes and find a common language to speak, but to come together with joint ideas for solutions and practical initiatives.

Conflict Transformation; Gender and Religion; Living as a Minority; anti-Semitism, Islamophobia, and Hate Speech; and Art and Culture were all subjects of intense workshops. This year also saw the beginning of a new Projects Development and Implementation track, designed to empower local community

activists to take their work to the next level. Together, the conference attendees engaged in detailed discussions of pressing religious topics, participated in a series of conversations on genocide awareness, conversed with high-level diplomats about local and global political issues, and shared diverse religious practices with each other.

## Committees and Workshops

**Conflict Transformation | Chaired by Rafael Tyszblat and Dagmar Kusá**



The 21 participants of the Conflict Transformation committee joined us from 13 different countries and widely varied backgrounds, drawing on rich experiences in community organizing, religious engagement, theatre and dance, academic research, and of course, conflict transformation. They explored the roots of conflict and analyzed the mechanisms of violent escalation from interpersonal to international conflict, and discussed resolution mechanisms from family mediation to intercultural dialogue on global issues.

Guided by two of our most experienced committee chairs, participants produced collective analyses of conflict situations, conflict triggers, escalation, and de-escalation. They discussed the crucial

role of identity through the lenses of human needs theory and dignity and humiliation studies. They drew upon insights from the field of neurobiology, anthropology, and psychology, highlighting the role of conformity, emotions, and social emotions for the process of conciliation.

In dialogue and mediation sessions, participants learned about the steps involved in such processes. They considered the community processes necessary for the transformation of conflicts rooted in identities, including the structural environments required for peacebuilding, community dialogue for addressing conflict, and how contesting narratives shape differing versions of the past. Participants mapped their own life experiences to the “cycle of revenge/cycle of transformation” as it was experienced in their own communities. After the Conference, many participants declared that they still benefit from the learning they got out of the committee for their respective community and professional life.

### **Gender and Religion | Chaired by Irtefa Binte-Farid and Gabor Solt**



The goals of the Gender and Religion committee were to create a safe space

that empowered participants to talk to one another and learn about each other's religions, cultures, and mindsets with regard to gender and related issues that play a key role in our daily lives. Participants also set out to deconstruct definitions that limit such conversations, including the recognition of a plurality of opinions within each of our religious traditions.

These goals were achieved through small and large group discussions, texts and facilitative games which enabled storytelling and fruitful discussions of controversial topics. Over the course of the week, the 21 participants discussed and explored stereotyping and othering; personal gender narratives and the social construction of gender; economic, religious, political, and societal power structures; the role of media; personal experiences of faith and religion; and the relationship of participants toward views of gender in their religious communities.

Because of the enormous diversity within the group, participants and chairs were very often able to draw on personal experiences from their lives to illustrate examples and to personalize discussions. The multiplicity of participants' cultural, religious, and academic backgrounds, as well as their experiences with issues of gender, exceeded all expectations. Their curiosity, openness, patience, and proactivity turned this one week into a highly meaningful and impactful experience for everyone involved, and participants left empowered to engage in interfaith and intercultural dialogue in their home communities.



### Living as a Minority | Chaired by Flora Petak, Maryam Mohiuddin Ahmed, and Sami Elmansoury



The Living as a Minority committee included 25 participants, representing 15 different countries. Participants explored cultural and religious minority identities and the situation of these minorities within the society, from both personal and societal perspectives. In the process, they developed deeper understandings of the perspectives of cultural and religious minorities, as well as of the majority society, and helped one another understand these different perspectives through an empathetic lens.

During the first part of the week, the committee focused on minority identities through exploration of participants' own experiences. Participants shared their personal stories, allowing others to engage with different perspectives, and allowing storytellers to consider their own vantage points through different lenses. Participants and chairs developed a safe place to share their experiences and understand the perspectives of other religious and cultural groups. One such exchange took place between an Israeli Jewish participant and a Palestinian with an Israeli citizenship, a powerful experience for both parties.

In the second part of the week, the committee elaborated on case studies in smaller groups, which were then presented to the committee as a whole. These case studies were prepared by the participants prior to the conference, and introduced a range of examples from around the world in which religious minorities are restricted in their religious practices. Participants identified core problems, analysed difficulties particular to each case, and explored possible solutions. As a result of all of these activities, the committee has developed an international network of students and young professionals who continue to engage with one another for new perspectives on minority issues, and for support and advice on projects in their local communities.

### Anti-Semitism, Islamophobia, and Hate Speech | Chaired by Denisa Nestakova, Sami Elmansoury, and Rachel Suranyi



The committee on anti-Semitism, Islamophobia, and Hate Speech included 19 participants from 12 countries, each of whom brought unique perspectives to the topics at hand. The chairs provided an introduction to the elements and forms of anti-Semitism, Islamophobia, and other examples of discrimination and hate. The committee explored how these

phenomena impact one's identity, life, and point of view toward the "other"; identified the stereotypes and prejudices behind 'othering'; discussed the role of the media in framing current events; and introduced alternative lenses and innovative ways to view and combat these global problems.

The methodology of the committee included a mixture of training techniques (small and large group discussions, role playing, simulations, lectures, case studies, etc.) designed to inform, demonstrate, and enhance learning. The chairs used both experiential and didactic methods with an increasingly progressive emphasis on active participant involvement over time.

After establishing a safe space for far-reaching conversations on emotionally-fraught topics, the committee discussed the difficulties involved with properly identifying and defining instances of hate and prejudice, up to and including the committee title. The complex histories of anti-Muslim and anti-Jewish bigotry were explored, along with their political dimensions, as was the thin line between free speech and hate speech. The group developed proposals for concrete, collaborative projects to address these issues, ranging in scale from the local to the global level, and have since begun to implement them.

## Art and Culture | Chaired by Aziz Sohail and Jacob Kohn



The Art and Culture committee consisted of 16 participants from 9 countries, about evenly divided between Muslim and Jewish faiths. Participants came from Bosnia, Egypt, Germany, Hungary, Israel, Macedonia, Malaysia, Morocco, and Sudan. Ashkenazi and Sephardic Jews as well as Sunni Muslims were represented. With the goal of helping participants tell their stories in ways going beyond the written word, the committee investigated traditional and modern artistic expression in Islam and Judaism; explored how stories express the intersection of culture and religion through music, theater, and visual media; and assessed the power of those stories in social and political contexts.

The committee began with a series of trust-building exercises to help participants recognize important aspects of their identities that they might share. We continued with a unit using "Theater of the Oppressed" to explore our capacity to react to and portray anti-Semitism and Islamophobia, applying techniques used in real-life conflict situations. From there, we moved to activities that allowed us to explore the participatory nature of storytelling as a form of catharsis, and a guest-workshop

from Daniel Kahn on the role of music in resolving conflict.

Throughout the week, participants explored interfaith arts programming and built artistic networks amongst each other. The committee culminated in a 30 minute final performance during the closing ceremony that utilized the concepts and experiences gained throughout the conference (which received a standing ovation from the audience). Learning from their experiences with each other, committee members are now exploring ways to develop further arts-related projects at future MJC events and in their home communities.

### Projects Development and Implementation | Chaired by Carla Habib, Eduardo Placer, and Lionel Mitelpunkt



This year for the first time, the Muslim Jewish Conference created a committee consisting of selected participants - already knowledgeable in the fieldwork of interfaith dialogue and active in these activities year-round - to share experiences and collaborate on both new and pre-existing project ideas, with an emphasis on development and implementation. The goal of the Projects

Development and Implementation committee was to allow these individuals to share their personal strengths, networks, and insights with each other and the broader MJC, enhancing our role as a global hub for interfaith work and as a support network for local projects.

Participants and chairs came to the committee ready to share, engage, teach, learn, and create together. These individuals are no longer at the entry level of ideation, so their unique value lies in being part of interfaith work that already exists in the real world, as well as their ability to enrich one another through their specific lenses, and to model project-based leadership for the conference at large.

Following the chairs' introductory team-building workshops and sessions on public speaking, design thinking, and the particular challenges of violent extremism, participants took the lead in a series of workshops addressing ways to generate support structures that address the immediate needs related to the development of their work back home, sharing and analyzing best practices with each other. Topics included Pitch Workshops, Leading Interfaith Work, High-Level Donor Giving, and Grant Writing and Fundraising.

We also received feedback on how to define, develop, and implement our new projects-focused track going forward, and are working with participants, team members, and alumni on ways to optimize the utility of this committee for future conferences.

## Conference-Wide Programming

### Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Berlin

This year the Muslim Jewish Conference organized two exclusive events at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Berlin in coordination with Foreign Minister Steinmeier. Participants first attended an Opening Ceremony with remarks by German State Secretary Stephan Steinlein, along with MJC's Secretary General, Ilja Sichrovsky, and Vice Secretary General, Maryam Mohiuddin Ahmed.

We returned to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs the following evening for a

reception, followed by speeches with Ira Forman and Shaarik Zafar, Special Representatives from the US State Department whose work focuses on issues facing Muslim and Jewish communities in the United States and around the world. Participants had the opportunity to present questions, which sparked an illuminating dialogue about the difficulties, as well as the possibilities, of Muslim-Jewish cooperation, and the importance of cooperation between civil and governmental institutions.





## Religious Activities and Panels



Responding to past participant feedback, this year the Muslim Jewish Conference created a team within the Content Department solely responsible for conference-wide religious programming. The religious advising team worked to create an atmosphere of mutual understanding, supportive of religious pluralism and gender equality.

Shaykh Ibrahim Hussein of the Madina Institute in Toronto and Jeremy Jones, an Australian Jewish community leader, joined us for the entire conference, participating in interfaith panels and making themselves available to participants and staff for in-depth discussions of religious topics. On Friday, Shaykh Ibrahim led Jumma prayer while Muslim participants explained the components of a prayer service. On Friday evening, Jewish participants organized and led a traditional Kabbalat Shabbat service that included prayers, songs, and candle lighting.

## Genocide Awareness Program

Midway through the conference, attendees participated in a series of lectures, workshops, and dialogue sessions on the topic of Genocide

Awareness. At the Berlin Town Hall, following opening remarks by State Secretary Tim Renner, we were treated to powerfully emotional speeches from Rachel Mann, a Holocaust survivor and Berlin resident, and Suvad Čehić, a survivor of the Bosnian Genocide. We were also treated to a fascinating presentation by Professor Muhamed Jusic, on the political and societal situations that allow for genocidal events, the need to recognize and understand these phenomena and their persistence, and find ways to prevent the possibility of genocide in the future.



Returning to our conference venue, we viewed a film on the Rwandan Genocide, titled “Shared Memories,” which follows the story of a Rwandan who was able to survive, having learned lessons from studying the Holocaust. Participants followed this with a dialogue about the difficult, yet important topics explored throughout the day, and the importance of sharing stories, recognizing signs of societal deterioration, and developing networks of understanding and cooperation to identify and combat the spectre of genocide and other human rights violations.

## Israel/Palestine Dialogue

As one of our “elephants in the room,” over the years the Muslim Jewish Conference has recognized and responded to the need to provide space for respectful, informed, broad-based dialogue on topics related to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Participants join us from all over the globe with varying degrees of interest and experience with these issues, but with a genuine desire to learn about each other’s perspectives and discuss possible solutions and strategies for constructive engagement. This year we introduced the topic by

holding a Question & Answer session with Sulaiman Khatib (Director of Combatants for Peace) and Chaya Esther Pomeranz (member of the World Zionist Organization), two MJC affiliates with rather divergent perspectives on the conflict, but who nevertheless recognize the need for dialogue and mutual understanding. The session was followed by small-group discussions, facilitated by MJC team members, in which participants were able to talk about their own experiences and points of view, and learn about one another’s perspectives.





## Towards the *Muslim Jewish Agency*: A Global Hub for Dialogue, Projects, and Interfaith Training

The Muslim Jewish Conference is a place for inspiration and impact, as evidenced by the scores of projects that participants come up with during the week of interaction, and further develop with our support as alumni. The new Projects Development and Implementation track helps participants realize and refine their ideas, and implement them once they return to their home countries.

The Projects committee participants worked with each other, and together with the rest of the conference, to develop joint projects and outline recommendations on how to constructively bring Muslim and Jewish communities together - dealing with key issues affecting both communities, such as anti-Semitism and Islamophobia, the role of the media in promoting hate, and the importance of education in combating these trends.

In our fast-changing global political climate, we have observed the need for swifter action when it comes to peacekeeping and support. Therefore, the MJC core team has concluded that a formally incorporated Muslim Jewish Agency, Inc. (MJA) as an umbrella body to continue this work outside of and in addition to our annual conference is necessary. The mission of the MJA would be to foster mutually supportive relations between Jews and Muslims by encouraging dialogue between, and leadership of, a new generation of organization and movement leaders,

educators, academics, dialogue facilitators, and parents committed to a more peaceful and cooperative world.

The MJA will serve as a convener and nexus for other interfaith institutions in order to have a long lasting impact on the ground, and to change the world as we know it. Sustained year-round activity is needed to fully support and implement all of the alumni-led and -conceptualized projects and initiatives.

Initially, the primary activity of the MJA will involve hosting several regional cross-cultural conferences to provide young people with a more positive framework for establishing Muslim-Jewish relations, through the exchange of knowledge, ideas, and experiences as well as the development of mutually supportive courses of action. To encourage ongoing communication and contact, participants and alumni will be invited to design projects and will be actively involved in implementing these initiatives throughout the year. This work will be supported by a professional Project Development and Implementation department within the MJA.

As the organization grows, it will expand its focus, serving as a platform for connecting actions and providing educational resources to communities, institutions, academics, and the media on topics relevant to Muslim-Jewish relations. Utilizing our roster of skilled activists and experienced educators, and our established reputation as a leader in the field, we can provide guidance to new organizations working in these areas, and we can serve as networking platform for existing interfaith institutions and hub for ongoing actions. It is also crucial that

our conferences continue to flourish, further solidifying the MJA's role as a leader in cross-cultural relationship-building as a foundation for these additional functions.

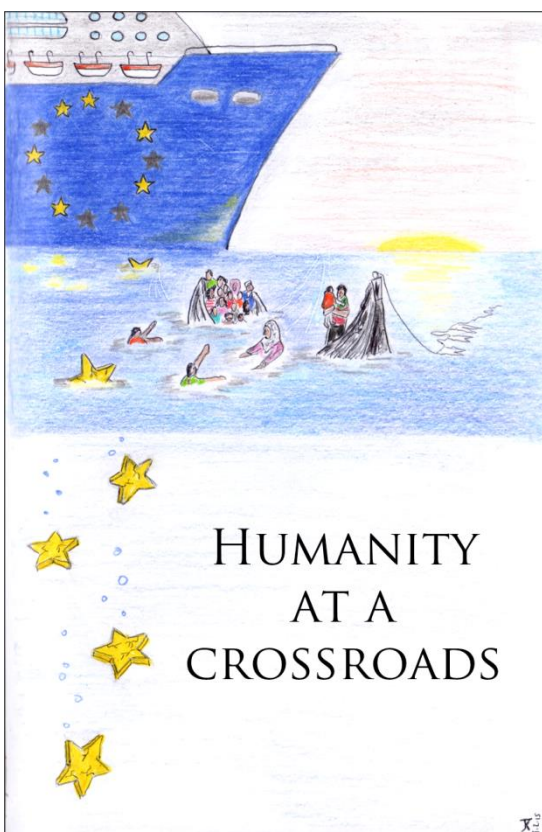
Of our many alumni-led endeavors around the world, the MJC would like to highlight a few of the following projects, also urging political, financial, and communal support for the following recommendations, focusing on issues connected to Muslim-Jewish relations.

## Projects

### Responding to the Ongoing Refugee Crisis

As Europe witnessed a peak in the number of migrants and refugees crossing its borders in search of a better

future, tensions also rose to unprecedented levels. But as intolerant sentiments initially managed to get the better of many European communities, MJC alumni and team members decided to show the full meaning, and to demonstrate the true possibilities, of Muslim-Jewish collaboration. MJC affiliates worked with one another to swiftly set up a specific Facebook group to identify existing projects, and to connect people who needed help with people who wanted to help, and most crucially, to people in our communities who knew how to help. This led to multiple continuous actions in at least 6 different European countries, which included providing food, clothing, medical supplies, and shelter, as well as help with administrative orientation and basic language courses to newly-arrived individuals and families. This model of



On 27<sup>th</sup> August 2015, 71 men, women, and children were found suffocated in a van in Austria. It did not happen as an act of a war in a conflict zone; it happened at our doorstep in Europe in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. If you thought that the suffering of refugees was something distant and remote, you have been proven wrong.

We can no longer remain aloof as this crisis unfolds.

This gruesome event in Austria has shown us that the current refugee crisis is not an abstract political problem, but a matter of life and death for hundreds of thousands of innocent people. This crisis is a humanitarian challenge requiring urgent action. People fleeing persecution in their home countries desperately seek new homes, where they can find safety and freedom – not horrific deaths.

This need for shelter, freedom, and safety is a need shared by us all.

We – a community of Muslims, Jews, and other faiths – form the Muslim Jewish Conference (MJC) family. We are 400 activists from more than 40 countries combating prejudice and fostering interfaith partnerships within our communities for the past six years. We recognize that our shared history of discrimination and persecution, and our shared values of justice and compassion, help us relate to those who are not afforded the same freedoms that we now enjoy.

Our community of Muslims, Jews, and people of other faiths call upon you to embrace the same intercultural and interfaith spirit. We encourage you to speak up against this rising tide of violence and to provide a voice of reason for mutual understanding.

We call upon you - governments of our countries – to immediately develop plans to help refugees and prevent an impending humanitarian catastrophe.

We call upon you - our religious leaders - to follow the wise words of our sacred books full of care, kindness, and love and to reach out to help those in need.

We call upon the public to act, to volunteer, and offer help to refugees by any means possible. Furthermore, we ask you to take concrete action and establish platforms for inclusive intercultural and interfaith dialogue, through which we aim to fight indifference, hatred, and violence.

It is the responsibility of each and every one of us to work together for a united society. No one should ever experience or witness such injustice and suffering.

WE MUST ACT, AND IT MUST BE NOW.

immediate, sustained interfaith collaboration can and will be replicated for similar future events.

### Connecting Action

The Muslim Jewish Conference has recently established a partnership with several organizations, working for the past years on “active coexistence” in Europe and particularly France, focusing mostly on youth. Among them, *Coexister* joins the MJC to co-organize a French-European inter-organizational encounter, gathering members of intercultural and interreligious movements in order to exchange best practices, create common platforms, and initiate joint projects. The initial meeting will take place in Paris in 2016 and will be the first in a series of meetings that will be more and more inclusive, and will take place in cities across Europe.

### International Rapid Response Alliance

With rapid globalization, disparate communities are coming into closer contact with each other. While this presents immense opportunities for learning, it also increases the potential for friction and intolerance. Reports of hate crimes, discriminatory acts or racist events, both in Europe and around the world, are on the rise. The goal of the *International Rapid Response Alliance*, now in development, is to create an alliance of faith-based or faith-linked organizations that unequivocally and unapologetically condemn hate crimes, racism and discrimination, wherever they target people's' faiths, on a joint platform. Such a joint platform will have transparent representation, local and international

legitimacy, and actively speak out against racism and bigotry of all forms.

### The Immigrant Stories Art Project

As a large and regionally-diverse community, MJC has many participants who are descendants of refugees or immigrants. The purpose of this project, now in development, is to tell those stories - through various forms of writing and art - and to highlight the message that we are all come from migrant backgrounds, and should embrace those in need of a new home.

### The History Project: Phase Two

The History Project is an innovative educational textbook and dialogue tool developed to tell dual narratives of India and Pakistan in schools. The founders of this project - Ayyaz Ahmad and Abdullah Leghari - are MJC alumni and team members, and are working to apply this project to a new case in the near future. They are collaborating with other MJC team members and alumni to lay the groundwork for a similar, high-quality educational book focusing on narratives in Israel and Palestine.

### MJC Cookbook With Recipes From Around the World

The Muslim Jewish Conference is in the process of producing a cookbook made with recipes from around the world, written by MJC participants from different countries and cultures. Each recipe will be accompanied by the stories of how participants' families arrived at their current destination, or memories of the homes they families were forced to flee. Proceeds from sale will go to support

efforts to alleviate the current refugee crises.

## Further Recommendations

### **Jewish-Muslim Encounters and Joint Initiatives**

Throughout history the relations between Muslims and Jews have been complex and diverse, both positive and negative. More often than we tend to realize, they have been of a positive nature, and were characterized by mutual respect and dialogue. For the last several decades, however, positive relations between Muslims and Jews have been repeatedly challenged by intolerance and radicalism. This state of affairs is not inevitable. Spaces for Jewish-Muslim engagement need to multiply, both at the global and local level, if we are to counter the rise of hatred on both sides. Such encounters can (and do) provide a unique opportunity for young people to talk about social, cultural, political or religious issues that are of mutual concern, and to initiate joint projects to address common challenges. After meeting and conceptualizing joint projects, participants need assistance in refining their project proposals and support in securing resources and funding to actually implement these projects. As experience has proven, it is crucial to support grassroots initiatives in order to provide unbiased and safe platforms of communications.

### **Highlighting Positive Interactions on the Local Level**

There is a need to increase cooperation between Muslim and Jewish communities locally, which we can do by highlighting

this cause in the media by providing coverage about existing opportunities of interfaith and interreligious activity. The news media tends to focus its attention on political and global issues, dedicating little space to issues within communities, or to cooperation and positive interaction between different religious groups and minorities. To improve Muslim-Jewish cooperation, it is important to present real stories, both historical and contemporary, about positive interaction, coexistence, and cooperation between Muslims and Jews. Such projects need to be nurtured and supported.

### **Information and Fact-sharing on Muslim & Jewish Communities**

The internet and social media can be a place for inter-communal hate and violence but they also provide great platforms for building bridges and sharing valuable information on faith-based identities and culture. Blogs, chats, video-conferences can be some of the virtual places where real people could talk to real people without intermediary or bias. Sharing personal stories on cultural, religious or social aspects of our lives is a powerful weapon against ignoring or rejecting the other. With such internet tools, any citizen can have the power to impact the attitudes and behaviors of a high number of other citizens. One such project is the MJC-sponsored *International Interfaith Educational Toolbox*. Participants from different countries, who work with interfaith education in different environments and publics, are developing a pedagogy hub to exchange techniques and materials, and to be in touch with each other for advice and feedback.

## Intra-Jewish and Intra-Muslim Dialogue Programs

It is an understatement to say that both the Jewish community and the Muslim community are divided at present. These divisions occur globally and locally and the result for Jewish and Muslim communities is an increase in fear. A divided identity is an identity that often seeks an outside enemy to unify against.

Intra-identity and intra-faith dialogue are a necessity for all identity and faith-based communities in order to help anchor identities, strengthen group cohesion and increase collective intelligence, addressing common issues. Therefore, the MJC recommends promoting and supporting the implementation of intra-faith dialogue programs within Jewish and Muslim communities, both globally and locally.





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## MJC in the News – 2015

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