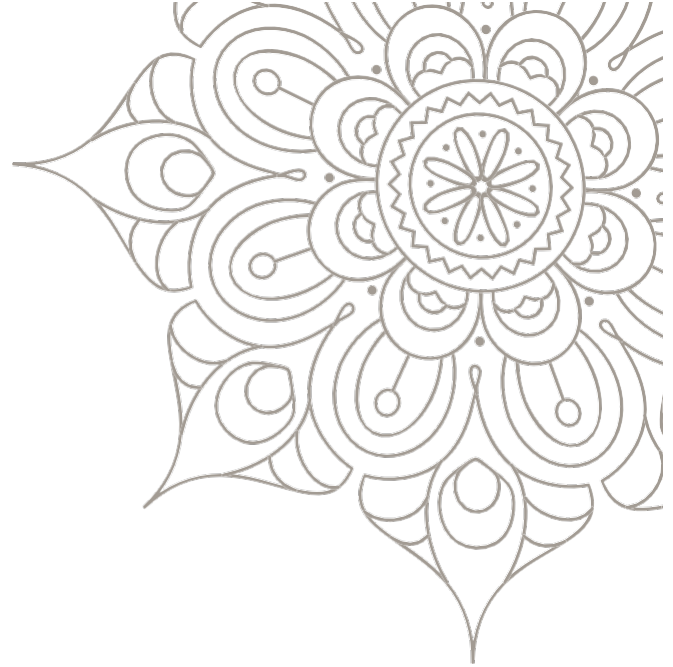


Muslim Jewish Conference Report

2020 & 2021 Interim Report



*“WE TALK TO EACH OTHER,
NOT ABOUT EACH OTHER”*

Overview

We started the Muslim Jewish Conference 11 years ago. We have committed this decade to forming innovative networks of cooperation amongst a new generation of Muslim and Jewish change makers, entrepreneurs, and allies. Over the course of 10 annual conferences, we have identified significant opportunities to enhance mutual understanding, respect and cooperation among Muslims and Jews in the areas of :

- HUMAN RIGHTS
- BUSINESS AND COMMERCE
- EDUCATION
- AGRICULTURE
- ARTS AND CULTURE
- SCIENTIFIC AND MEDICAL RESEARCH
- STANDARD OF LIVING
- INTERNATIONAL PEACE AND COOPERATION

With this in mind, we aim to create and sustain the necessary connections to enhance mutual understanding, respect and cooperation among young entrepreneurs, civil society leaders, organizations and institutions by convening Muslim and Jewish communities.

The MJC is an initiative that has proven its utility. To move forward with the MJC and to expand its impact, we need to develop the sustainability and professionalism that the Muslim-Jewish community needs for the next ten years. Our communities need a dynamic mixture of safe spaces for activists, entrepreneurs and experts to share best practices and to work in innovative networks of cooperation. We will support highly skilled ambassadors, professional communities, local chapters and international initiatives. We can mobilize young multipliers and drivers of change on local, European and international levels.

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.

History

Since its founding in 2010, the MJC has hosted a conference every year in cities including: Vienna, Austria; Kiev, Ukraine; Bratislava, Slovakia; Sarajevo, Bosnia and Herzegovina; Berlin, Germany; and Paris, France.

Approach

The 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,” interfaith and intra-faith dialogue, the 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

The MJC is led by professionals 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 alumni across more than 50 countries, who work in their own communities to promote the MJC vision and support alumni-led projects that amplify the message of peaceful dialogue, rippling the effect of the conference. Furthermore, they spearhead the attempt to create local chapters around the globe and spread the MJC’s vision while creating change on the ground.

MJC - Facts & Numbers



We have welcomed participants to the MJC from all over the world, including:



Afghanistan, Albania, Argentina, Australia, Austria, Azerbaijan, Belgium, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Brazil, Bulgaria, Canada, China, Costa Rica, Croatia, Czech Republic, Denmark, England, Egypt, Finland, France, Georgia, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Iceland, India, Indonesia, Iran, Iraq, Ireland, Israel, Italy, Japan, Jordan, Kazakhstan, Lebanon, Libya, Malaysia, Malta, Mexico, Montenegro, Morocco, Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Pakistan, Palestine, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Saudi Arabia, Scotland, Serbia, Slovakia, South Africa, Sudan, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Syria, Turkey, Tunisia, Ukraine, USA & Yemen.

MJC CONFERENCES & COMMITTEES 2010 – 2019

<p>MJC 2010 🌿 60 VIENNA AUSTRIA</p> <p>Islamophobia & Anti- Semitism / Education / The Role of Media</p>	<p>MJC 2014 🌿 120 VIENNA AUSTRIA</p> <p>Gender and Religion / Arts & Culture / Collective Memory / Historical Narratives & Identities / Conflict Transformation / Power and Religion</p>	<p>MJC 2017 🌿 140 SARAJEVO BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA</p> <p>Beyond religious borders: Muslim Jewish intellectual exchange / Gender, religion intersectionality and prejudice / Power Religion and Human Rights / Anti-Semitism, Anti Muslim racism and hate speech / Project Development and Implementation</p>
<p>MJC 2011 🌿 70 KIEV UKRAINE</p> <p>Anti-Semitism & Islamophobia / Conflict Transformation / Muslim-Jewish Arts Track / The Role of Media</p>	<p>MJC 2015 🌿 140 BERLIN GERMANY</p> <p>Conflict Transformation / Power Gender and Religion / Living as a Minority / Anti-Semitism Islamophobia and Hate Speech / Arts and Culture / Project Development and Implementation</p>	<p>MJC 2018 & Connecting Actions 🌿 120 PARIS FRANCE</p> <p>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</p>
<p>MJC 2012 🌿 80 BRATISLAVA SLOVAKIA</p> <p>Anti-Semitism & Islamophobia / Faithful Citizens & Positive Narratives / Sustained Community Dialogue / Women in Religion / Muslim-Jewish Business Venture / Muslim-Jewish Arts Track</p>	<p>MJC 2016 🌿 150 BERLIN GERMANY</p> <p>Historical Narratives and Identities / Conflict Transformation / Power Religion and Human Rights / Arts and Culture / Us and Them: Encountering Marginalization / Projects Development and Implementation</p>	<p>MJC 2019 🌿 60 VIENNA AUSTRIA</p> <p>Training workshops, sharing best practices, visioning, strategizing and pre-launch of the Muslim Jewish Alliance following the MJC's 10th anniversary gala.</p>
<p>MJC 2013 🌿 60 SARAJEVO BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA</p> <p>Conflict Transformation / Anti- Semitism & Islamophobia through Cinema / Back to the Basics: Introduction to Judaism and Islam / Gender and Religion / Hate Speech and its Influence on Public Opinion / Education and the Effects of Historical Narratives</p>		

2020 difficulty and resilience



For the first time in a decade the MJC was not able to conduct its annual gathering. We have had to expand and adapt to cater to a scattered world. This year we employed a number of initiatives in order to bring us together despite the difficulties. We deployed technological means of communication, worked with more partners and organizations than before, and still managed to make a difference against all odds. Through our support network we kept in constant touch with our Alumni network, creating customized sessions for specified needs. We ensure nobody welcomed 2021

alone with three days straight of video conferencing, catch ups and check ins. Our goal was to address loneliness, anguish, and apathy the same way we have took on hate and oppression all these years. We start with the individual before we can take on a society itself. Since we knew most of us were at home and isolated, we understood that the media was playing an even bigger role in our lives than ever before. We took part in two major media projects, we thought we could make weather reporting more inclusive and up to date, and published a series of videos to lend people an ear and gave them a platform to express their views. In a world slowly being consumed by noise, we try to cocreate the content representing as many as possible.

This year for many people was filled with hardship and isolation. The MJC is an organization that at its core is designed around communal values and collaboration across all boundaries. This year we made an ambitious effort to gather the community, even when travel was restricted, using digital platforms, cultural iconography, and grassroots communication to succeed to some degree in bringing people together. One of our main feats was the continuous stream of video conferencing, check ups, brainstorming, and lectures we were able to coordinate from all corners of the world.

MJC Network Support

We incorporated a monthly “check in” to help our vast and widespread community through this tumultuous year. Our alumni were given an opportunity to talk to us and each other, sharing experiences, pains and successes, to uplift and to bring our community closer. Many were isolated completely, lost people close to them, or simply needed a space to discuss political or personal plight. We created themed discussions ranging from medical and political topics to culinary roundtables, and simple sharing sessions. The aim was to give our community the support and structure to get through what was to many of us one of the hardest years yet.

Involvement in the Neue Deutsche Medienmacher initiative:

We worked with the Deutschen Medienmacher Initiative in order to bring about a cultural shift in the way we coin weather systems with inherently eurocentric names. In cooperation with Goran Golik und M. Alexander Trybus we took the patronage names for weather systems in Germany having names such as Ahmet, Goran, Jussuf, Flaviu, Dimitrios, Dragica,, Chana (www.wetterberichtigung.org). This was an effort to rephrase the stereotypical names into more diverse and inclusive ones. Historically weather systems had eurocentric names like Paul and Joseph. This year we took part in a campaign to bring about a bountiful bouquet of weather names from various cultures and backgrounds.

Diplomacy Matters Series at DePaul University

One of our founders Ilja Sichrovsky took part in a podcast/interview series undertaken by the University of DePaul known as “Diplomacy Matters”. This is a part of the university’s Applied Diplomacy initiative, a department specializing in solving society's most complex problems. We took this opportunity to apply our particular brand to the diplomatic process, emphasizing grassroots efforts and organizational structure as primary in effecting change. The Diplomacy Matters initiative is ideal for collaboration with the MJC as they prioritize a diverse understanding of reality that takes in various cultures and creeds.

Muslimische Kulturtage Berlin - Juma Festival

We were honored to be featured at the Muslim Cultural Days in Berlin 2020. They allowed us the privilege of sending out a message to the audience where we emphasized our conference’s hopes, intentions and ideals. Muslim Cultural Day in Berlin offers a variety of events ranging from “artists to academics” with the goal of promoting and appreciating Muslim culture in Germany today. Beyond promotional and celebratory achievement the Muslim Cultural Days also are an attempt to address important discussions in and around Berlin, making Muslim identity and culture more prominent and positive in Europe today.

MJC New Year Support Sessions

We understood that after a tough year, bringing in 2021 alone wasn’t an appealing prospect for many. Using our extensive network and established “check up” system throughout the year we coordinated 3 straight days of political discourse, mental health workshops, and a general sharing session to give everyone a platform to talk. At the MJC our community’s mental health and overall security of life is paramount to anything else, we ensure that nobody feels alone, and contact is never cut off.

Breaking Patterns



**Co-funded by the Civil Society Empowerment
Programme of the European Union**

In April 2021, Connecting Actions and the Muslim Jewish Conference invited five Europeans, Jews and Muslims, to share their own stories of meeting with the Other. Those leaders, who all have had an interfaith experience through the Muslim Jewish Conference and Connecting Actions and who continue to lead the way in interfaith cooperation in Europe, had very different stories. They come from different countries (Germany, France, the United Kingdom, Italy) and very different backgrounds. All of their stories illustrated the type of journey one can experience when going through such a deep interfaith engagement. They also reflect the diversity of what it means to be Muslim or Jewish in Europe today.



They showed that, despite the centrality of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict in fostering antagonism in the broader Muslim-Jewish relationship, the confrontation is not inevitable. That in the real world, Jews do not have to hate Muslims, Muslims do not have to hate Jews, Jews do not all agree with each other and Muslims do not all agree with each other. They also show that it is often a lifelong struggle for both Jews and Muslims to fully shape their identity and worldviews. Finally,

they show that it is possible to see what is common in the Other, while acknowledging what remains different. Because identities are always evolutive, complex, subtle and multiple, the role of interfaith dialogue is to create a space where this complexity can unfold without being taken advantage of. More than just meeting with the other and breaking down the stereotypes Jews and Muslims may hold about each other, those encounters have allowed these persons to broaden their world views and develop a renewed sense of humanity. These stories illustrated the long, difficult but transformative path of reaching out to the other while maintaining a sense of self identity.

They also showed that, far from being a threat to one's own identity, interfaith exchange is in fact a powerful way to better define and strengthen this self-identity. They showed that spaces like the Muslim Jewish Conference are the best thing that can happen to anyone feeling the slightest curiosity about the other, as they allow for deep learning and sustained change.

Those personal stories, explaining their specific relationships to Islam and Judaism, their original preconceptions about the other, the interfaith shifts they went through in their lives and their recommendations for the future of Jews and Muslims in Europe.

Organized as part of the CONCORD consortium, the MJC and Connecting Actions decided to organize this event in the format of a high level private conference for a selection of MJC Alumni. The idea was to make it a discrete forum where former MJC attendees could safely share their journey of shaping their own identities and meeting with the other. Adapting to COVID requirements we met digitally producing 5 testimonies from varied backgrounds that have been compiled into an e-book. We selected alumni who presented unique and challenging backgrounds in order to produce a healthy discourse about difference and who have continued to carry forward the MJC's message and mission in their work. By bringing together varied and complex ethnic, religious, and racial backgrounds we made room for a discussion that break down stereotypes, does justice to the complexity of people's identities and gives hope for the future of intercommunal relations in Europe, particularly among the Jewish and Muslim communities.

To follow up the with the lessons of this process, a public conference is being prepared for July 1st, sharing these testimonies with an audience of young people who have not yet been exposed to interfaith spaces, discussing the impact of interfaith dialogue, as a way of strengthening one's identity, as well as breaking down stereotypes. Here are some inspiring quotes that were recollected during the interviews at the private conference:

“Being at MJC was my first time hearing about the Israeli-Palestinian conflict from the ‘other’ perspective.”

“My advice for the upcoming generations of young Jews and Muslims : be a part, not apart.”

“You can only learn more about yourself and stimulate personal growth when you engage in dialogue with people who think differently from you.”

“At the MJC, we haven't invented interfaith but we have reshaped it, spiritualized it, made it more inclusive, more participatory and more heart-opening.”

“My whole MJC experience was essential in helping me consolidate that shift from ignorance to being informed.”

“It has been 5 years since my first contribution on the Muslim Jewish Conference but I still feel a strong connection with the MJC Alumni.”

“Just being friends with Muslims did not automatically lead to the very core and “hard issues”. This was the main reason that drove me to apply for the MJC.”

“I can still breathe the pain and the collective experience of our remembrance services at the genocide site of Srebrenica and the concentration camp of Sachsenhausen.”

“There were a wide range of different opinions that were met with utter respect, acceptance and curiosity. It should be natural, but it was almost unbelievable to me that something like this was possible”.

“At the MJC, I was surrounded by people from the most diverse backgrounds, who shared the same curiosity in getting to know each the real way, not just with superficial chit-chat.”

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Mohamed Abu Bakr, Board Member
Rafael Tyszblat, Programming Adviser
Sami El Mansoury, Head of Facilitation

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Mohamed Abu Bakr, Co-Founder and Board Member.
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Mazza FarajAllah, Co-Director
Elizabeth Berman, Director of Contents & Research
Daniel Pincus, Director of the Board
Shaina Hirsch, Head of Applications & Visa
Inbal Drue, Head of team travels
Manuel Molzer, Film Production
Sarah Bencherif, Head of Press

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