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ICCI INSIGHTS & INFORMATION

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WELCOMING THE POPE TO ISRAEL

Dear friends,

Why has the Pope been invited to pay a state visit at this time by the leadership of the State of Israel? And, what message of great importance will he bring with him, for Israelis and Palestinians, for Jews, Christians and Muslims, who all share this same Land?



Notwithstanding the bumps in the road in the ongoing relationship between the current pope, the Jewish People and the State of Israel, Pope Benedict has decided to come to Israel this month to strengthen his ties with the people and the state of Israel as well as to reach out to local Christians in the Galilee and Bethlehem. This pope will follow in the footsteps of his predecessor, Pope John Paul II, who made a historic visit here in March 2000, by combining diplomacy with pilgrimage.

Since December 30th, 1993, with the signing of the Fundamental Agreement between the State of Israel and the Holy See at the Foreign Ministry in Jerusalem (I was there to witness it), there have been full diplomatic relations between these two sovereign entities. Not only has the Vatican recognized the State of Israel as the state of the Jewish People, but the state of Israel has recognized the Vatican and entered into negotiations with its leadership. This is undoubtedly one of the most important diplomatic achievements of the State of Israel and of the Holy See in recent times.

How did this come about? This agreement is part of the revolution in relations between the Jewish People and the Catholic Church for the past 50 years, since the end of World War II. Indeed, the preamble to this historic agreement states clearly that the framers were "aware of the unique nature of the relationship between the Catholic Church and the Jewish people, and of the historic process of reconciliation and growth in mutual understanding and friendship between Catholics and Jews".

In addition to reaffirming the diplomatic relations, the Pope is coming to the region with a message of peace and reconciliation. Indeed, at the end of his first day in Jerusalem, on May 11th, he will pay tribute to all those people and organizations in Israel and Palestine who actually engage in interreligious dialogue for peace in this part of the world. At a special convocation and reception, the Pope will acknowledge and encourage people who are working

in this field to continue and expand their work in the years ahead. According to the Papal Nuncio, H.E. Msgr. Antonio Franco, the Apostolic Nuncio in Israel, "this special event will be held in Jerusalem because we strongly believe that there should be respect and cooperation among people of different religions in order to help reach peace in the region."

Not much is known about those people and organizations which have been engaged in interreligious dialogue for peace in Israel and Palestine in recent years. Very few people know about the quiet achievements of long-lasting dialogue and action groups which involve religious leaders, women, youth, young adults and educators who meet regularly to encounter the divine image in The Other and engage in reconciliatory action projects to mitigate hatred and violence and to offer an alternative path of peaceful coexistence. The very fact that the leader of the Catholic Church will devote a major audience in his one day in Jerusalem is testimony to the importance that he places in the message of peace and the method of dialogue.

This is not a time to focus on the problematics of the relationship between Israel and the Vatican. There will be other occasions for this. This is a celebratory moment, a time to say "dayenu", to express gratitude for the Catholic Church's commitment to strengthen and enhance diplomatic relations with Israel. At the same time, it is a unique opportunity to "seek peace and pursue it" (Deuteronomy 16:20) by responding positively to the Pope's message of peace and the existential imperative of dialogue between peoples and religions as a way to promote peaceful living in this land that is holy to Jews as well as Christians and Muslims.

L'shalom,
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UPCOMING PROGRAMS AND EVENTS

Dirasat Weekend – June 4-6th

A **Dirasat Weekend is planned for June 4-6, 2009**, as a collaboration between ICCI and **Neve Shalom / Wahat al-Salam**. The Dirasat ("study" in Arabic) program, an innovative program of interreligious study, created by **Doumia-Sakinah**, the Pluralistic Spiritual Center of the Arab-Jewish village of Neve Shalom / Wahat al-Salam ("Oasis of Peace"), in partnership with ICCI, offers Jewish, Christian and Muslim theologians and clergy the opportunity to study their respective sacred texts together, in an environment committed to political change and social transformation. After initially working with the faculty of religious seminars, we plan to develop joint study opportunities for their students as well.

Jewish-Muslim Seminar in Baqa el-Gharbiyya – June 21st

A **seminar and symposium on "Teaching Islam to Jews and Judaism to Muslims in Israel" is planned for 21 June, 2009**. This follow-up seminar to the highly successful one which took place in November 2008 in Jerusalem, will take place this time at **Al-Qasemi College** in the Israeli-Arab town Baqa el-Gharbiyya, in cooperation with ICCI, the **Nehemia Levzion Center for Islamic Studies of the Hebrew University of Jerusalem**, and the **Konrad Adenauer Foundation**. Following this day, working groups will continue to meet to develop policy recommendations and action plans for the future.

ICCI's 18th Annual General Meeting – June 16th

ICCI's 18th Annual General Meeting will take place on June 16th, 2009. This year, the meeting will revolve around the topic of "Challenges and Dilemmas in Arab-Jewish Relations in Israel." **ICCI members: PLEASE SAVE THE DATE.** The Annual General Meeting is held in 3 parts: 16:00 reception, 17:00 program and 18:30 Business meeting. Location to be announced.

ONGOING PROGRAMS AND EVENTS



H.E. Msgr. Antonio Franco, the Apostolic Nuncio to Israel

Special Public Symposium in Honor of the Pope's Visit

A public symposium on the eve of the visit of the Pope to Israel took place on April 30th, 2009, at the Notre Dame Cultural Center in Jerusalem. The 2-hour symposium focused on "Interreligious Dialogue for Peace and Reconciliation in Israel and Palestine". **H.E. Nuncio Msgr. Antonio Franco** greeted the assembly, followed by a moderated discussion panel and a public Q&A session. Speakers included Bishop Dr. Munib Younan, Head of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Jordan & the Holy Land, Fr. William Shomali, Rector of the Latin Seminary in Bet Jalla, Prof. Muhammed Dejeni, Founder of Wasatia and Dr. Deborah Weissman, Co-chair of ICCI and President of ICCJ. The discussion was moderated by ICCI director Rabbi Dr. Ron Kronish. The event was a collaboration between Mercy Corps, ICCI and The US State Department.

Face to Face / Faith to Faith

On April 6, 2009, the Face to Face / Faith to Faith program participants visited the **Domari Gypsy Center** for several hours. They learned about the Gypsy community in Israel from Domari's director, **Amoun Sleem**. Later on, they played with the children of the center, engaging them in activities that they enjoyed.

On April 23, 2009, the program participants met with **Rabbi Yitzhak Ben David**, an Orthodox Rabbi who is a member of ICCI's KEDEM interreligious program for religious leaders of the Jewish, Muslim, Christian and Druze faiths. Rabbi Ben David spoke to them about different approaches in Judaism regarding the treatment of the "other", i.e. the Non-Jew.

The Face to Face program is a partnership between ICCI and the **Auburn Theological Seminary** in New York.

The Jerusalem Interreligious Young Adult Forum (JIYAF)

On April 1, 2009, the forum members visited **Beit Hanina** at the invitation of John and Mazen, two of the forum members who are local residents. The group walked along the Separation Barrier and heard the story of the village that was divided into two parts, separated by a wall – one part in the domain of the Palestinian Authority and one part adjoined to the municipality of Jerusalem.



JIYAF members

The group later reached the **Qalandia Checkpoint**, and observed as travelers crossed from one territory to the other. Most of the group members had previously seen the checkpoint, but being there as part of a joint group of Israelis and Palestinians had significant impact on their point of view. Additionally, the group met with the women of **MachsomWatch** (<http://www.machsomwatch.org>), who told them about their experiences and activities.



St. Ethelburga's

ICCI ACTIVITIES IN THE UK:

During the week of April 20-26th, ICCI Director Rabbi Dr. Ron Kronish gave 2 workshops for the **St. Ethelburga's Centre for Peace and Reconciliation** in London and Winchester, England. The topic of the workshops was "The Other Peace Process—Interreligious Dialogue in the service of Peace". In addition to leading these workshops, Dr. Kronish conducted discussions with the professional leadership of St. Ethelburga's on ways and means of cooperation in the future on creative and innovative programs in the field of peace and reconciliation in England and in Israel.

Rabbi Kronish additionally presented a text-study lesson and gave a Saturday morning sermon at **Alyth North Western Reform Synagogue** in Hampstead Garden Suburb in northwest London on Saturday, April 25th on "Israel Independence Day Sabbath". The text-study was on the topic of the Israeli Declaration of Independence and its ramifications for today, while the sermon focused on interreligious dialogue in Israel.

During his visit in the UK, Dr. Kronish also met with new and veteran donors to ICCI to strengthen ICCI's financial stability for this year and the years ahead.

ICCI IN THE MEDIA

The **Common Ground News Service** website published an article by Joshua M. Stanton (of the **Journal of Inter-Religious Dialogue**, <http://irdialogue.org>), on the 14th of April 2009. The article, titled "Youth Views: Taking dialogue to the next level", includes Mr. Stanton's impressions of his encounter with the Jewish and Muslim high school students currently participating in ICCI's Face to Face program.

<http://www.commongroundnews.org/article.php?id=25296&lan=en&sid=1&sp=0&isNew>

The **Catholic News Service** website published an article by Judith Sudilovsky on the 16th of April, 2009. The article, titled "In Israeli Jewish schools, no teaching about Christianity", includes insights from **Daniel Rossing** of the **Jerusalem Center for Jewish Christian Relations (JCJCR)** and **Rabbi Ron Kronish**.

<http://www.catholicnews.com/data/stories/cns/0901735.htm>

Rabbi Kronish was also interviewed for **Times Online** by Michael Binyon, for an article published on April 24, 2009. Rabbi Kronish talked about "Keeping the flicker of peace alive when hope is fading."

<http://www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/comment/faith/article6164039.ece>

The **Jewish Telegraphic Agency** website (jta.org) published an Op-Ed by **Rabbi Kronish** on April 30, 2009, titled "Papal Trip to Israel is not time to focus on problems". In this article, Rabbi Kronish that the occasion of the Pope's visit to Israel marks the time for "seeking peace and pursuing it," rather than focusing on the problematics of the relationship between Israel and the Vatican.

<http://jta.org/news/article/2009/04/30/1004818/op-ed-papal-trip-to-israel-is-not-time-to-focus-on-problems>

ICCI's April 30th symposium was covered by Matthew Wagner of the **Jerusalem Post**, in an article entitled "Pope's visit sparks high hopes." Among the interviewees were **Bishop Dr. Younan, Fr. Shomali, Dr. Dejeni and Dr. Weissman**, the symposium's speakers.

<http://www.jpost.com/servlet/Satellite?pagename=JPost%2FJPArticle%2FShowFull&cid=1239710831760>

The symposium was also the subject of an article by Yehonathan Tommer for **OhmyNews**, published on May 4th, entitled "Papal pilgrimage: Benedict XVI's imminent visit magnifies yearnings for peace and tranquility in the Holy Land." The article describes the hopes and expectations of the pilgrimage that were unanimously expressed by the panel of Jewish, Muslim and Christian thinkers at ICCI's Notre Dame symposium.

http://english.ohmynews.com/articleview/article_view.asp?no=385183&rel_no=1

VISITING GROUPS

On Thursday, The 30th of April 2009, Dr. Kronish met with a visiting interfaith group of 19 people from Columbus, Ohio, led by **Rabbi Harold Berman and Wendy Finch McCusker**. The group, comprised of a majority of Christians and a few Jews, received a briefing from Dr. Kronish about the current situation in Israel.

INTERRELIGIOUS INTERACTIVE EDUCATIONAL PROGRAMS

ICCI's Center for Interreligious Encounter with Israel is offering **programs to participants of visiting and long-term groups/programs in Israel**. Our programs are offered to both **high school and university students** and all of them involve a short presentation, informal conversation and group discussions. Visitors will meet with alumni and current students from ICCI's Youth & Young Adult programs. Our programs are interactive and flexible, and we will work with interested groups on tailoring the program to their size, needs and schedule. Programs involving **lectures and traditional panel discussions** are also available for **visiting/long term groups**. **For more information and/or to book a program, please contact communications@icci.org.il or 972-2-561-1899.**

ICCI STAFF

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Zuzanna Radzik, Student Intern for Special Programs
Rebecca Russo, Student Intern, Youth Program

ICCI serves as the Israel chapter of Religions for Peace (WCRP) and is a member of the International Council of Christians and Jews (ICCJ).

INVEST IN PEACE – SUPPORT ICCI

To support the groundbreaking and innovative programs of ICCI which bring people together from many sectors of Israeli and Palestinian society to learn to live together in peace, to engage in reconciliatory dialogue and education, and to prepare the way for a better future for all citizens of Israel and the surrounding region,

contact us at: communications@icci.org.il.

**Please also visit our new JGooders page:
<https://www.jgooders.com//ProjectCard.asp?ProjectID=613>.**