



Dialogue must go on

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This message is for all of you who have been active in Jewish Christian dialogue and in Three Faiths initiatives for many years.

We are living in very painful times. Right now, it is hard to look to the future; the present, the sense of loss and the devastation that we all experience are beyond description.

And as if that was not enough global antisemitism has engulfed our world. Jewish people have lost their sense of safety in Israel and also everywhere else in the diaspora.

We have written papers about antisemitism in the past, most recently in 2019 (The Demands of Our Time, www.iccj.org), we have conducted webinars and held consultations on the subject. All these have helped us reflect about and fight against this repulsive hatred, but nothing has prepared us for this tidal wave, in fact a Tsunami.

Antisemitism is very different when you have to live with it on the receiving end, when you wonder what to fear next, what to hide first : the mezuzah on your door, your star of David or your kippah? Must we repeat this : antisemitism though a problem for the Jews should not be a problem of the Jews! Jewish people should voice how this affects them, but the fight against it should be picked up by non-Jews. Expecting Jewish people to fight this on their own is imposing a double burden upon them.

Now is perhaps not the time for another statement but rather for a display of solidarity.

We can all do something, and even if it is only a small gesture, we must undertake it every day.

Jewish people are shattered and frightened, they expect their Christian friends to reach out to them. They are bewildered by people who appear to live in a parallel world as if nothing has happened, seemingly indifferent to their plight, whereas they live with the return of ghosts from their past.

Jews are apprehensive of those who openly attack them. Many say they are deafened by what they experience as the silence of their non-Jewish friends; others reply to enquiries about their well-being by saying that they cannot possibly be well. The psychological effect of heinous discourse on social media is not to be disregarded. It threatens both institutions and individuals alike. These cowardly anonymous menaces terrorize them wherever they are.

Jewish people, especially at grass root level in our member organizations, may choose to revert to "dwelling alone", letting their sense of loneliness permeate their entire being and overwhelm every other feeling they have, thus withdrawing from the rich realm of encounter and dialogue that we have all contributed to create.

We cannot let this happen. Christians have to continue to show that they care deeply about their Jewish friends. Jewish people have to let Christians know how they really feel and what would help them. Conversations will undoubtedly follow that will not be easy, but it is vital for the future of our work that we do not let a barrier grow between us, a barrier of unspoken words. Healing our broken

world will be necessary and will require time and effort, but healing should start now while many of us are overcome by mourning, grief and fear.

I have travelled to Austria and to Italy these last weeks and have witnessed the vitality of our member organizations in both countries. I know that all of you are equally engaged and active in all our member organizations worldwide.

Our work remains invaluable, and we have a sacred obligation to continue. I am deeply grateful to you all for your unwavering commitment.

Dialogue must and will go on! We will not let violence destroy the spiritual friendship between us, a spiritual friendship that is so dear to us all.

We can all do something about this!

Liliane Apotheker is ICCJ President.