



Greetings from International Jewish Committee on Interreligious Consultations

30.11.2013 | Rabbi David Fox Sandmel

Shalom. It is my honour and privilege to bring greetings on behalf of the International Jewish Committee on Interreligious Consultations to this Plenary Session of the 10th General Assembly of the World Council of Churches.

The International Jewish Committee on Interreligious Consultation represents Reform, Conservative and Orthodox Jewish movements, the Anti-Defamation League, the American Jewish Committee, B'nai B'rith International, the Israel Jewish Council for Interreligious Relations, and the World Jewish Congress. It was founded over forty years ago to cultivate relations with other international religious bodies.

This past week, as part of synagogue worship around the world, Jews read from the book of Genesis about the birth of Jacob and Esau, the twin sons of Isaac and Rebecca, who seemed, from their very conception, to be in conflict with one another – “and the children struggled within her.” (Gen. 25:22) Throughout the centuries, Jewish and Christian biblical commentators often understood the relationship between our two traditions to be reflected, if not foretold, in this struggle. Each community considered itself to be Jacob, or as he came to be known, Yisrael - Israel, God’s true and only covenantal partner. Each saw the other as Esau, who rejected God and God’s promises. These mutually exclusive interpretations resulted in distrust and enmity, violence and persecution, including, within living memory, the destruction of six million Jews in the Shoah, the Holocaust. It is, therefore, with gratitude that we remember that the World Council of Churches, at its founding meeting in 1948 in Amsterdam, stated unequivocally “anti-Semitism is a sin against God and man.”

In light of this history, we Jews view with horror the growing violence against Christians and Christian communities in places such as Egypt, Syria, India, Nigeria, Indonesia and Pakistan. We are dismayed that the world seems to ignore the suffering that is being inflicted. It is particularly unjust to the peoples in those places, and prolongs their pain when their plight is minimized, and hypocritical when other conflicts are spuriously given as the reason for their situation, let alone identified as more important.

We who gather here in Busan as Israelis and Palestinians are in the midst of negotiations that, we pray, will lead to the establishment of a Palestinian state alongside Israel so that Jews, Christians and Muslims can live in peace with one another and worship without fear at their holy sites. We are heartened by those on all sides who are working not only to achieve a political solution but who also strive together to overcome trauma, such as the Parents Circle Family Forum, a joint Palestinian Israeli organization of over 600 families, all of whom have lost a close family member as a result of the prolonged conflict, and whose activities have shown that the reconciliation between individuals and nations is possible. These brave families teach us that peace can only come if the subjective perceptions of justice on all sides are considered and respected. I note here as well Israeli hospitals where Jewish and Arab physicians and nurses are treating hundreds of wounded Syrian men, women and children as well as IsraAid, an Israeli NGO that provides disaster relief around the world and is currently working quietly with Syrian refugees in Jordan.

These examples show us how people from different nations and traditions can be, in the words of Isaiah, “repairers of the breach and restorers of the lanes for habitation.”

I now turn back to Genesis: we should also remember that the conflict between Jacob and Esau is not the end of the story of their relationship. In two weeks, we Jews will read about the reconciliation between the two brothers (Gen. 33) and how they later cooperated with one another to bury their father Isaac (Gen 35:29). It seems that they were able to overcome the strife that began in the womb. Today, in many parts of the worlds, Jews and Christians now live in harmony. While we disagree about whether the Messiah is to come or come again, we are, in the felicitous phrase of the Christian theologian Clark Williamson, “partners in waiting.” Until that day, we can and must work together to alleviate suffering, promote justice and repair our world for the reign of God. Ken yehi ratzon, may this be God’s will. Amen.

Source: [World Council of Churches](#).