Joint Declaration Issued by the International Catholic-Jewish Liaison Committee at Its Meeting in Capetown, South Africa, November 4-7, 2006

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This was the first ILC meeting since the 40th anniversary of the historic declaration of the Second Vatican Council, *Nostra aetate*, which has significantly transformed relations between the Catholic Church and the Jewish People. During this past year celebratory events were held around the world, as well as an official event in Rome organized by the Holy See"s Commission for Religious Relations with the Jews. The ILC participants expressed much satisfaction at the level and breadth of these commemorations which testify to the commitment on both sides to advancing their unique bilateral relationship. The ILC participants affirmed the importance of educating the members of their respective communities about the positive changes in the Jewish-Catholic relationship ushered in with the promulgation of *Nostra aetate* 41 years ago. This is a task for both Catholic communities – especially in developing countries and areas of rapid growth such as Africa, Asia and Latin America where Jewish communities are not always present – as well as for Jewish communities in Israel and other parts of the world which sometimes have little contact with Christians.

Since our last meeting the Catholic-Jewish dialogue has lost one of its principle supporters with the death of Pope John Paul II. On this occasion, we wish to respectfully remember his historic contribution throughout his pontificate to the advancement of the dialogue between the Church and the Jewish People, and between the Holy See and the State of Israel. The ILC participants were pleased to note the increasing effectiveness of the dialogue, including the dialogue between the Pontifical Commission on Religious Relations with the Jews and the Chief Rabbinate of Israel,

which testify to the need felt on both sides to consolidate open and productive exchange on the great questions facing religious belief in the present world circumstances.

The 19th ILC meeting began with a public event hosted by the Mayor of Cape Town, the Honorable Helen Zille, and in the presence of South African national, regional and municipal authorities, as well as local religious personalities. In addition to the co-presidents of the ILC, Cardinal Walter Kasper and Rabbi David Rosen, the Chief Rabbi of Israel Yonah Metzger, the Chairman of the International Jewish Committee on Interreligious Consultations Rabbi Israel Singer, the president of the Southern African Catholic Bishops' Conference Cardinal Wilfrid Fox Napier, the Chief Rabbi of South Africa Warren Goldstein, and the Chair of the Cape Council of the Jewish Board of Deputies of South Africa, Mrs. Moonyeen Castle and the Premier of the Western Cape, Mr. Ebrahim Rasool addressed the opening session. The Deputy President of South Africa, Phumzile Mlambo Ngcuka, also spoke to the assembly during the first plenary session.

The deliberations of the ILC focused on the imperatives that follow from our common affirmation that all people are created in the divine image. Moreover the very vulnerability of the sick demands special concern on our part. Indeed care of the sick and less fortunate is perceived as the very emulation of the divine attributes.

In addition to deepening our understanding of the guiding values of our respective heritages rooted in a common Biblical patrimony, presentations and discussions also focused on specific responsibilities regarding HIV/AIDS. This includes education, treatment, care, especially for the orphans and people affected by AIDS, and the need to eliminate stigmatization and marginalization.

While recognizing that our respective traditions may differ regarding possible preventative strategies with respect to HIV/AIDS and related afflictions, we unreservedly unite in calling for unrestricted palliative care and appropriate attention for all those suffering, threatened and victimized by this tragic pandemic. This call goes out especially to governments and all who have the power, means and influence to implement it.

Much attention was given to the reasons behind the tendency to stigmatize those affected, and to the need for religious teaching to stress that every person is the bearer of an inviolable dignity because they are created in the image of God. That dignity can never be lost or taken away no matter what the circumstances or personal situation of people. The reality of millions of orphans, especially in sub-Saharan Africa , was seen as a pressing call for greater attention on the part of the international community aimed at enabling the economic and social development of the countries involved.

The participants also visited a number of practical projects in the Cape Town area in which the Catholic Church and the Jewish Community are active, in order to identify the best and most effective ways in which they might jointly address the challenge of the pandemic.

The ILC also focused on specific issues that followed from the deliberations at the 18th meeting: in particular, the need to expand and intensify cooperation between our communities, to condemn and respond to resurgent anti-Semitism, bigotry and terrorism. We again recall the words of Pope John Paul II that anti-Semitism is a sin against God and humanity.

The delegates resolved to adopt a widespread program of education to make known the significant developments that have taken place in Jewish-Catholic relations since Vatican II.[*] They pledged to conduct these educational efforts in both Jewish and Catholic communities and to mobilize the resources of their respective religious and communal organizations to make this a significant part of their joint and separate agendas. They agreed that different programs must be provided for

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different age groups, cultural contexts and for the two religious communities recognizing that education holds the key to mutual respect and joint moral leadership that have become the basis of their relationship.

The ILC delegates deplored the rise of radical fundamentalist rhetoric, often coated in religious sentiment and terminology, and they agreed to work for serious, multilateral, interreligious dialogue. We determined to work together towards Pope Benedict XVI`s vision of fruitful interfaith dialogue that promotes authentic respect among cultures and religions. In this context the ILC discussed ways to engage in dialogue among Jews, Christians and Muslims, in some form of trilateral dialogue born out of recognition that while there is an obligation to stand up against the violent and prejudicial abuse of religion, combating extremist influences necessitates reaching out to and strengthening the voice of the predominant moderate voices in every culture.

At the same time as we face the terror of pestilence and poverty we face the terror of human violence and hatred. In this context we condemn Holocaust denial and reaffirm the commitment to the right of the Jewish State to live in security and peace.

In the face of increasing violence in the world, the ILC delegates reaffirmed their commitment to work for justice and peace, especially in the Middle East. Our religious heritages offer us the principles and motivation to do all in our power to overcome the terrorism and violence that surround us through a vigorous defence and promotion of the dignity, security and liberty of every human being.

We are convinced that through deepening our own mutual understanding and cooperation, and extending this beyond our bilateral relationship, we may be a force for good, dignifying the Divine Image in our world.

Cape Town , South Africa , November 7, 2006

* This sentence refers to a report by Lawrence H. Schiffman and Joseph Sievers, Learning about Ourselves while Learning about Each Other: Proposals for Jewish and Catholic Education, which was presented and affirmed at the ILC meeting. Two supporting studies that were distributed and verbally summarizedat the ILC meeting are also available: Anat Barber, "Jewish Community Institutions and Education in Interfaith Efforts" and Maria Brutti, "Jews and Judaism in European Catholic Catechisms and Textbooks.

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