# New Initiative in Latin America Seeks to Promote Jewish-Muslim Dialogue

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**On June 2, a new initiative named the “Latin American Center for Studies, Dialogue and Encounters of Judaism and Islam” was launched in Buenos Aires, Argentina, in the presence of both Jewish and Muslim officials. ICCJ Executive Board member Rabbi Shmuel Szteinhendler was present to bless the event.**

In the presence of representatives from the Argentinian government, a large delegation from the Argentinian Muslim community, Jewish officials and academic authorities such as Rabbi Abraham Skorka, a new initiative named the “Latin American Center for Studies, Dialogue and Encounters of Judaism and Islam” was officially presented on the evening of Thursday, June 2. The event took place in the library of the Latin American Rabbinical Seminary Marshall T. Meyer in Buenos Aires, Argentina.

Introductory addresses were made by Nancy Falcon who is the Executive Director of the Center for Intercultural Dialogue, and by Rabbi Ernesto Yattah who is the Dean of the Rabbinical School. Rabbi Ariel Stofenmacher who is the Executive Vice President of the Seminary was quoted saying that “Certain milestones and events generate realities. This moment will generate a reality and implement a certain type of organization that we have been missing”.

Rabbi Stofenmacher also spoke of Rabbi Abraham Yehoshua Heschel and Cardinal Augustus Bea, who promoted dialogue as an act of brotherhood rather than a meeting between strangers. The new center, abbreviated as CELAJI (Centro Latinoamericano para el Estudio, Diálogo y Encuentro del Judaísmo y el Islam) will provide an organized framework for initiatives that are already underway. Rabbi Yattah drew from personal experience during his address, speaking of his upbringing, being a Sephardic Jew born in Argentina and raised in an Arabic-speaking household with a good relationship to Muslim neighbors. He also mentioned an interfaith trip to Turkey organized by the Center for Intercultural Dialogue as a milestone event, leading him to explore the possibility of deepening the Jewish-Muslim relationship.

Rabbi Yattah then invited Rabbi Burton Visotzky of the Jewish Theological Seminary of New York, US to speak. The latter is the author of numerous books and scholarly articles on interreligious studies, and has been shortlisted as one of the most influential rabbis in the United States. Rabbi Visotzky spoke of the impact of September 11, 2001 on the relationship between members of different faiths, and concluded that "An attack on any religion is an attack on all religions”, stressing the importance of interfaith dialogue between Judaism and Islam.

The presentation of the new center for interfaith studies and dialogue concluded with ICCJ Executive Board member Rabbi Shmuel Szteinhendler blessing the initiative with the traditional “Shehecheyanu”, a blessing used within Judaism to mark a special occasion.

We congratulate those involved on this milestone event, and hope that it will continue to be successful!

Source: ICCJ.

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