People, Ideas and Boundaries on the Move

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Press Release of the International Catholic-Jewish Liaison Committee on the 24th International Catholic Jewish-Liaison Committee Meeting (Rome, Italy, 13 to 16 May 2019), 17.05.2019

The 24th meeting of the International Catholic-Jewish Liaison Committee (ILC) was held in Rome, Italy, from 13-16 May 2019.

The ILC is a partnership between the Holy See's Commission for Religious Relations with the Jews and the International Jewish Committee for Interreligious Consultations (IJCIC), the coalition of the world Jewish communal organizations charged with official relations with other world religious bodies. The ILC held its first meeting in 1971 in Paris, marking an historic establishment of relations between the two religions following the publication of Nostra Aetate, the declaration of the Second Vatican Council that opened a new era of relations between Catholics and Jews.

This meeting, which was hosted by the Italian Bishops' Conference and the Holy See's Commission for Religious Relations with the Jews, included delegates from many nations.

The formal opening session was held at the Palazzo della Cancelleria in the heart of Rome. It was attended by the Prime Minister of Italy, Giuseppe Conte, and many other dignitaries. The Chairs of the two organizations that sponsor the ILC, Cardinal Kurt Koch and Rabbi Daniel Polish, offered greetings and outlined the purpose and aspirations of the conference.

The President of the Italian Bishops' Conference, Cardinal Gualtiero Bassetti, and the President of the Union of Italian Jewish Communities, Ms. Noemi Di Segni, both extended greetings. These were followed by greetings by representatives of the local Church of Rome and the Roman Jewish Community.

The conference, titled "People, Ideas and Boundaries on the Move," recognized that both of our communities are impacted by the challenges of major migrations of people moving from place to place. We are also challenged by the ideologies, hostilities, and policies that have precipitated and accompanied this worldwide catastrophe. The conference recognized the stark and often painful choices that policy makers, social service institutions, and religious leadership must make on a daily basis.

The opening day provided an opportunity to explore the migration issue in depth. The speakers contextualized the discourse by framing the varied responses of governments, and how the NGO sector itself has responded. Sometimes the NGO sector is able to collaborate with government agencies and departments so that services are effective, and a longer-term strategy has been developed. In many other cases, the NGO sector, often representing our two faith traditions, must work at odds with government policies and practices to provide humane and responsible care.

The speakers were able, as well, to provide real examples of the often heroic and always challenging ways in which the Catholic and Jewish communities have each responded with resources, professionalism, and creativity to deal with a massive humanitarian crisis. The starkness of the growing challenge of peoples across borders, and even within nation states,

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demonstrates that our important efforts must expand and continue well into the future. The delegates affirmed the mandate to find continuing ways to address the challenges of the movement of peoples on the local, national and international level long after the conclusion of our meetings.

The ILC has learned the importance of site visits to reinforce the more academic framing of issues. An afternoon was devoted to a site visit to the refugee center managed and led by the Sant'Egidio Community. The delegates learned of their methodology for providing care and for integrating immigrants into the communities in which they work, and of their efforts to ameliorate the sufferings of at-risk migrant populations through "Humanitarian Corridors". These briefings were followed by direct meetings with refugees from numerous nations at the language and culture school run by the Sant'Egidio Community. Delegates became even more sensitized to the challenges: each national migration has a unique history, quality, and culture, and at the same time, there is much in common that all face at this time of dislocation.

Midway through the conference the delegates had the honor of meeting with Pope Francis. This Audience served to affirm, in the Pope's words that "…our rich spiritual patrimony must be ever more esteemed as we grow in mutual understanding, fraternity, and shared commitments…". Moreover, the Pope underscored the timeliness and import of our meeting in the face of the challenges of migrants, growing anti-Semitism and the persecution of Christians in many places throughout the world.

Following the meeting with Pope Francis, the ILC delegates reconvened to address the matter of the growth of both anti-Semitism and persecution of Christians. Recent events in too many places in the world, including those where terrorists murdered our respective co-religionists, underscored that this is not simply a matter for study but of grave and immediate challenge. The leaders of our two religious traditions are well aware, and our co-religionists have often been victims, of challenges to religious freedom in a growing number of countries around the world.

Two subsequent sessions offered in depth understanding of two areas: the status of Catholic Jewish Relations within our host country, Italy, and also an opportunity for an update on official relations between the Holy See and the State of Israel.

The 50th anniversary of Nostra Aetate yielded multiple new official responses that have elevated and intensified the Catholic-Jewish conversation. The ILC was birthed in response to the lofty aspirations of Nostra Aetate and this gathering serves as a fitting place to continue the dialogue around both the older and newer documents. Those documents continue to define and influence the relationship between Catholics and Jews, and their analysis help to define what remains for future collaboration and consideration.

The delegates established working groups to determine how to implement the insights of the plenary sessions on the local and regional level. The recommendations were presented at the concluding plenary session.

The Conference concluded with an affirmation of the extraordinary model of interreligious understanding and dialogue that the ILC represents to the world at large and to the religious world in particular. In their concluding remarks, Cardinal Koch and Rabbi Polish each underscored the depth of mutual respect and charged the attendees with the religious mandate to carry our sacred work forward.

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Source: Vatican.