



Religious leaders of the Holy Land in Auschwitz

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AUSCHWITZ – November 2016 - Thirty senior religious leaders of the Holy Land, among them Archbishop Pierbattista Pizzaballa, visited the Auschwitz death camp during a historic visit to condemn extremism and hatred.

During a trip to Poland, thirty members of the Council of Religious Community Leaders in Israel visited the former death camp Auschwitz-Birkenau. Among them were Archbishop Pierbattista Pizzaballa, Apostolic Administrator of the Latin Patriarchate of Jerusalem, the Orthodox Patriarch of Jerusalem Theophilos III, the Greek-Catholic Archbishop, Georges Bacouni, the Anglican Archbishop Suheil Dawani, Sheikh Mowafaq, Druze religious leader, Rabbis Dimony Icchak Elefant and David Rosen and two Sunni imams from Galilee.

The religious leaders were welcomed at the Memorial by the Auschwitz Museum Director Dr. Piotr M. A. Cywinski. They met with Archbishop Stanislaw Gadecki, President of the Polish Episcopal Conference, who welcomed the guests warmly as “missionaries of peace, that is, people for whom the quest for peace is a life mission.” The religious leaders also met with Cardinal Stanislaw Dziwisz, Metropolitan of Krakow, drawing their attention to St. John Paul II, who has always been a man of dialogue.

Together, they walked through the camp’s wrought iron gate marked by the words, “Arbeit Macht Frei” (Work makes you free) before laying flowers at the Wall of Death where the executions took place.

During the visit, the guests were accompanied by the Minister Wojciech Kolarski of the Chancellery of the President of Poland and the Israeli Ambassador to Poland Anna Azari, who said that “the tour of Auschwitz was the main objective of the visit of the Council members to Poland. It is very important because it is the most symbolic place, from which we can send out the message of peace between different religions. We are probably at the place where man fell to the very bottom, hence, it is appropriate to send out the call for a positive change from here.”

After the visit to the Auschwitz Memorial, the participants signed a joint declaration on peace in the world: “We believe that the Creator who rules the world in kindness and grace requires us to live in peace and show respect to all people”

The various representatives then participated in a time of dialogue among themselves, in sharing their experiences with members of the Board of the Centre for Dialogue and Prayer in Auschwitz.

The highlight of this meeting was the declaration of the Council of Leaders of the Religious Communities in Israel who condemns “racism, fanaticism and extremism, particularly when these are committed, allegedly in the name of religion.”

The meeting ended with a call for an end to war and a prayer for peace in line with the vision of the prophets, “They shall beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks. Nation shall not take up sword against nation, nor shall they learn war anymore.”

(Isaiah 2:4)

Source: [Latin Patriarchate of Jerusalem](#).