



# The 23rd International Catholic-Jewish Liaison Committee Meeting

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**The 23rd meeting of the International Catholic-Jewish Liaison Committee (ILC) took place in Warsaw, 4-7 April 2016. The ILC is the entity, created in 1971, formalizing the establishment of the official relationship between the Holy See and the worldwide Jewish community.**

The ILC is the official forum for ongoing dialogue between the Holy See's Commission for Religious Relations with the Jews and the International Jewish Committee for Interreligious Consultations (IJCIC). Jewish and Catholic representatives from five continents attended the gathering. Cardinal Kurt Koch, president of the Holy See's Commission for Religious Relations with the Jews, and Mr. Martin Budd, Esq., Chair of IJCIC, co-chaired the meeting.

This meeting was convened at an important time in history. The ILC emerged directly out of the Second Vatican Council and its profound transformative document, *Nostra Aetate*, the 50th anniversary of which has been celebrated and commemorated throughout the world. At the same time, there are challenges to interreligious and intercultural relations being felt by many millions in the world, not excepting Roman Catholics and Jews in many lands.

Poland was an appropriate setting for this meeting. It has been a venue for some of the most important and productive developments in both Catholic and Jewish culture and self-understanding, and also, in the 20th century, the scene of some of the most abhorrent events in world history. The ILC participants and the institutions they represent are fully cognizant of the dynamic tension that these two extremes represent and the noble challenge involved in developing contemporary understandings built on the lessons of the past. The participants are no less aware of how contemporary political dynamics have a direct impact on the human and social well-being of both Catholics and Jews in Poland and elsewhere in the world.

The meeting opened with a public event attended by leaders of both communities, civic and government leaders from Warsaw and Poland, and representatives of the Vatican, the Polish Church, and the State of Israel.

The co-chairs of this ILC meeting, Cardinal Kurt Koch and Mr. Martin Budd, each gave a presentation establishing both the historic context and the emerging challenges. Cardinal Koch stressed that over the years one of the welcome products of these meetings has been the development of real friendships between the participants and a genuine sense of partnership between the communities they represent. Mr. Budd underscored the symbolic significance of meeting in this place, Warsaw, with its freighted history, and at this time, in the aftermath of the 50th anniversary of *Nostra Aetate* and in this moment of moral challenge for people of faith. The evening culminated with a presentation by the Ambassador of Israel to Poland. On behalf of Yad Vashem, three Polish Catholics were posthumously recognized by the ambassador as "Righteous Among the Nations" for saving Jewish lives during the Shoah, embodying the noblest realization of Catholic-Jewish relations.

The agenda of the biennial dialogue had as its theme "The 'Other' in Jewish and Catholic Tradition: Refugees in Today's World." To provide a religious and academic basis for subsequent

discussions, the sessions began with in-depth analyses of how both the Jewish and Roman Catholic traditions and sources view “the other.” In keeping with the scholarly nature of these presentations, each speaker acknowledged the internal dialectic tension of the particular vs. the universal in each tradition, and emphasized the importance and moral integrity of accepting “the other” as an essential component of each tradition’s self-understanding. The presentations and the discussion that followed pointed out that our respective Scriptures provide us with a framework for addressing pressing social issues such as the refugee crisis of today. Responding to religious imperatives of Christians and Jews, the conference assessed the current refugee crisis overwhelming much of Europe, recognize the tensions between the obligations of love of strangers and the dignity of their creation in God’s image, with concerns for security and fear of change.

Although the last 50 years have largely seen unprecedented openness between our two communities in many places, not least on the international level, the last few years have witnessed a surge of problematic developments impacting both. After addressing how our respective traditions encourage us to help the other, we focused on how our two communities now find themselves in the position of being “other.” Anti-Semitism in both speech and action has resurfaced in Europe and elsewhere, and persecution of Christians, most notably in much of the Middle East and parts of Africa, has reached levels not seen in a long time.

Participants emphasized that antisemitism is real and takes many forms. It is a danger not only to Jews but also to democratic ideals. Improved and revitalized educational programs are necessary to combat it.

The participants noted that the persecution of Christians has increased every year between 2012 and 2015. They recognized the obligation to raise the consciousness across the world regarding this problem and acknowledged the moral responsibility to be a voice for the voiceless.

In recognition of the indisputable historic significance of the Shoah, the participants visited the Treblinka death camp. In a commemorative memorial, the leaders affirmed their commitment never to allow the tragedy to be forgotten, nor to allow the world ever again to permit such negation of the humanity or dignity of any human being, no matter his or her race, religion, or ethnicity.

Their visits to a Catholic social service agency and to the POLIN Museum of the History of Polish Jews underscored the critical role of Jewish and Catholic communities in contemporary Polish life. The meeting celebrated the Polish experience of transition from Communism, with its repressions, to the freedom of study and expression of religious faith in a new society.

In keeping with the significance of the ILC since its inception 45 years ago, the representatives reiterated their continuing commitment to open and constructive dialogue as a model for interreligious and intercultural understanding in the world, most especially with religious leaders of the Muslim community. They also reiterated the commitment to collaborate in addressing the emerging needs of their communities wherever they may be, and to convey their transcendent messages to a world so much in need of authentic and caring affirmation represented by their two religious traditions.

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