ICCJ Annual International Conference 2004

27.07.2004

Press Release

From 18 to 21 July 2004 the International Council of Christians and Jews (ICCJ) held its annual international conference at the Episcopal Academy of the Diocese of Aachen, Germany. There were some 90 participants - Jews, Christians and Muslims from 22 countries world-wide, among them bishops from various Christian denominations in Europe and the Middle East, the Vatican representative, rabbis from Israel and the Diaspora as well as Imams from various countries. The conference theme was "Changing Borders." Plenary lectures and seminars addressed the many facets of the future of the bilateral Jewish-Christian as well as the trilateral Jewish-Christian-Muslim encounter and dialogue, religious, sociological and political, in light of the many challenges posed by a dramatically changing world. Among the topics considered were, for example, the role of the media in the presentation and the disparaging of the Other, the limits of dialogue, and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

The ICCJ's annual Sir Sigmund Sternberg Award for sustained intellectual contribution in the furtherance of interreligious understanding which has had impact and influence beyond the society and borders of the recipient?s country was presented to Reis-Ul-Ulama Dr. Mustafa Ceric, the Grand Mufti of Bosnia-Herzegovina, in recognition of his "understanding of the need for active involvement, his spiritual guidance, intellectual contribution and social efforts in the promotion of interfaith and cross-cultural dialogue at all levels as a means of furthering reconciliation between people of different religious and cultural traditions in the interest of peace and harmony among nations."

In his acknwoledgement, which was also the conference?s keynote address, Dr. Ceric referred to the common roots of the three Abrahamic religions and pointed to the resulting obligation to strive for peace and dialogue. At the same time he criticized all those who do not perceive of other religions as partners but rather see them as a danger. He concluded with the last words of a Bosnian prayer "O God, if we forget Thee, do not forget us." Responses to his address were given by Rabbi Prof. David Rosen, Jerusalem, and Bishop Dr. Joseph Homeyer, Hildesheim, Germany.

At the concluding session two outstanding personalities were honoured with the award of the "Interfaith Gold Medallion ? Peace Through Dialogue." Professor Dr. Jean Halpérin of the World Jewish Congress, Geneva, received the award in recognition of his "unique ability to combine being a European in the best sense of the word with the world-wide vision of encounter across cultural divides. For bringing to the non-francophone world the insights and intellectual reflections of French speaking Jewry that have impacted on the Jewish-Christian dialogue whether of a more programmatic nature or expressing particular Jewish concerns, and for having embraced with sensitivity the new avenues offered in various African Christian-Jewish encounters."

Professor Dr. Stefan Schreiner of the University of Tübingen was given the award "in recognition of courageous and outstanding leadership in the field of Jewish-Christian encounter and dialogue since the time when Europe was still divided in every respect by an iron curtain, and for sensitively and expertly guiding the ICCJ through its Abrahamic Forum Council in broadening dialogue to include Islam wherever the three faith communities encounter each other in our time of vast population movements."

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Special tribute was also paid to Frau Ruth Weyl, ICCJ consultant and conference coordinator. Hearty thanks were expressed by the ICCJ Patron and President as well as all in attendance for her more than 30 years of engagement with the work of the ICCJ worldwide and her tireless efforts not only in preparation for and during the ICCJ conferences, but also in her ongoing promotion of dialog especially within the Youth Section of the ICCJ.

The International Council of Christians and Jews (ICCJ), founded over 50 years ago as an international organisation, today counts 37 members in four continents and 32 countries whose aim is the strengthening and encounter between the religions.

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