



# In Rome, Pope Francis asks WJC President Lauder to wish world Jewry 'Shana Tova'

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**02 September 2013. ROME – Pope Francis on Monday wished Jews around the world a sweet and peaceful year 5774, called for increased dialogue among the world's religious communities and opposed fundamentalism in any faith.**

During his first private audience with an international Jewish leader since being elected Catholic pontiff in March, Francis asked World Jewish Congress (WJC) President Ronald S. Lauder to convey his New Year message to Jewish communities world-wide and said he also needed a sweet year because of the important decisions lying ahead. Using the Hebrew words for 'Happy New Year', Pope Francis wished a "Shana Tova" and asked the WJC to share that message with the Jewish people worldwide. Lauder presented the pope with a Kiddush cup and a honey cake.

At their meeting, which was held in an informal atmosphere at the Vatican, Lauder and the Catholic pontiff spoke about the situation in Syria and agreed to speak out against attacks on religious minorities, such as Coptic Christians in Egypt and against trends to restrict well-established religious practices such as circumcision. The pope specifically expressed concern about the bans on kosher slaughter in Poland and directed Cardinal Kurt Koch, the president of the Vatican's Commission for Relations with the Jews, to investigate and host a follow-up meeting as early as next week.

Francis reiterated a statement made last June that "a Christian cannot be an anti-Semite" and said that "to be good a Christian it is necessary to understand Jewish history and traditions." He added that Jews and Christians shared the same roots and that dialogue was the key to building a common future. Referring to the conflict in Syria, the pope called the killing of human beings unacceptable and said "world leaders must do everything to avoid war."

After the meeting, Ronald S. Lauder praised the pope for his unwavering commitment to dialogue and said that "Pope Francis' leadership has not only reinvigorated the Catholic Church but also given a new momentum to relations with Judaism. Never in the past 2,000 years have relations between the Catholic Church and the Jewish people been so good. The leadership of successive popes over the past five decades has helped to overcome a lot of prejudice. This allows us now to work together in defending religious freedom wherever it is under threat and whichever community is affected."

Lauder was accompanied to the meeting at the Vatican by Latin American Jewish Congress President Jack Terpins, WJC CEO and EVP Robert Singer, WJC Associate EVP Maram Stern, and LAJC Executive Director Claudio Epelman.

*About the World Jewish Congress*

The World Jewish Congress (WJC) is the international organization representing Jewish communities in 100 countries to governments, parliaments and international organizations. Since

its foundation in 1936, the WJC has been at the forefront of inter-religious dialogue, notably with the Catholic Church.

Source: [World Jewish Congress](#).