



Muslim-Jewish Leadership Council's General Assembly in Matera, Italy

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MATERA, 18 September 2019 – Leaders of Muslim and Jewish religious communities in Europe issued a joint statement calling upon European institutions, policy makers and civil society to protect religious freedom, in part by respecting conventions governing diet, dress and the upbringing of children.

The statement, signed by 29 religious leaders from 19 European countries, was one of the outcomes of the Muslim-Jewish Leadership Council's General Assembly in Matera, Italy, which took place on 16 September and was co-organised by KAICIID and the City of Peace for Children Foundation.

On behalf of their religious communities, the signatories praised the European commitment to safeguard diversity but urged institutions and authorities to be vigilant and to "take steps to stop divisive and discriminatory discourse and hate speech, including Islamophobia and Antisemitism, designed to isolate our communities, make them appear foreign to Europe and its values or to set our communities against one another for political gain."

Based on the principles of European law, they called for equal treatment of all citizens, including Jewish and Muslim minority faith groups. MJLC members expressed deep concern at an "increasingly polarized political discourse and spread of misinformation in Europe which is endangering fundamental rights, provoking mistrust, and encouraging rising levels of Anti-Semitism and Islamophobia with attendant hatred and discrimination on a political, social, legal and personal level."

The statement mentioned in particular the need to protect religious freedom by "refraining from setting limitations upon, or seeking to determine the practice of Muslim and Jewish faith through limitations to choice of clothing, preparation of food and the raising of children".

To avoid misrepresentations or misinterpretations of their faiths and to counteract discriminatory policies, MJLC members agreed to create two commissions that will work on issues of shared interest currently under scrutiny in different countries: one being kosher and halal food and the other, the wider practice of religious freedom. Commission members with technical expertise in each field will offer advice, gather data and provide communication material wherever challenges arise.

"We need to reduce prejudice by framing our perspective in the terms used by European institutions" Imam Yahya Pallavicini, President of Comunita Religiosa Islamica Italiana and Vice Chair of the Council explained. "On the other hand, these institutions should not compromise our identities by prescribing how faith is to be expressed if this can be regulated internally," he added.

The MJLC will also produce background documents on the links between Muslim and Jewish faiths on matters of common concern which should provide the basis for joint advocacy. "When we demonstrate that Muslims and Jews are cooperating deeply and systematically, and

that we are and will continue to be Europeans, government institutions are far more willing to listen to us" noted Rabbi Fizon, Chief Rabbi of Metz and Moselle, and Advisor to the Chief Rabbi of France.

The MJLC assembly took place in the context of the Pax Matera celebrations, organised during the lead up to United Nations International Peace Day and highlighting the city's status as a European Capital of Culture 2019. Following a meeting of an MJLC/KAICIID delegation with the Mayor of Matera, Mr. Raffaello de Ruggieri and the Catholic Archbishop of Matera-Irsina, the Most Reverend Antonio Giuseppe Caiazzo, the city announced it will be receiving European Jewish and Muslim religious leaders every year from now on, as a sign of solidarity and a commitment to peace.

Following last year's general assembly in Amsterdam, this encounter welcomed new and high level members, including the Council's first Italian Rabbi. Representatives of Austria, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Denmark, France, Germany, Greece, Italy, Ireland, Lithuania, Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Russia, Slovenia, Spain, Switzerland and the United Kingdom also participated in the meeting.

Source: [Muslim-Jewish Leadership Council](#).