



## International Council of Christians and Jews

Jerusalem, January 30th, 2011.

Dear ICCJ members:

I have recently written a letter to you (see page 3), but recent events in my part of the world have moved me to write another. This time, my thoughts are exactly that—they are my own personal opinions as an Israeli Jew, not necessarily shared by every one on the Board of the ICCJ.

Beginning in December with the demonstrations for democratic reform in Tunisia, and, even more pointedly, with the recent unrest in Egypt, we in Israel have been watching the situation very apprehensively. There are 4 elements worth noting:

- 1) The developments caught us all by surprise. This shows not only a worrying failure of intelligence agencies both in Israel and the West, but also a lack of understanding of the implications of the Mubarak regime. Egypt has been long overdue for democratization.
- 2) Democratization in general is a good thing, often bringing human rights and social justice. But in the West, it took most countries many years to reach it. When it happens overnight, it can be worrisome. Democratic elections in the Middle East or in the Arab/Muslim world have sometimes brought the rise of Islamic states, in which there have been problems with human rights in general and in particular, danger to the non-Muslim minorities. The non-Muslims in Tunisia are about 2% of the population, but in Egypt they may be as high as 10%. After the unfortunate, violent Christmas season in both Egypt and Iraq, I am fearful for the welfare of the Christian communities in those countries.
- 3) Israelis, frankly, are very afraid of an Islamic state on our border. I hope that this isn't a particular case of Islamophobia, which I see as a very negative phenomenon in our world. Unfortunately, the Islamic states we have seen in our region have an

unimpressive record with regard to democracy and human rights. I personally believe that it is possible to reconcile devout Muslim belief and practice with a commitment to democracy, and I know Muslims who have successfully done that. But so far, the Islamic states have not.

4) We are also very fearful for the future of the almost 32-year-old Peace Treaty between Egypt and Israel, which we consider to have been one of the more positive and stabilizing factors in the Middle East.

I want to bring two more hopeful voices: a young person in the Egyptian Diaspora has written me: "We may be young and in the Diaspora, but the most powerful tool to stand in solidarity that we have is a voice, something that the government attempted to take away yesterday. Many have been skeptical and fearful of the fall of the regime for fear of who may take over but reading and following yesterday, this was something the whole country has been crying for. From the poorest to the most educated. We don't deny that there's fear of what might come but we hope for a better future, integrity and freedom... for all."

And an Israeli-based Christian has written: "I am sure though that we are all praying that what emerges from the Egypt turmoil will be a democratic regime based on respect for all citizens... even if the chances of that right now are very slim..."

My response to both is a hearty: "*Insh'allah...*"

Dr. Deborah Weissman, Jerusalem

ICCJ President



## International Council of Christians and Jews

Jerusalem, January 2011.

Dear friends and colleagues,

It has been some time since I have written a general letter to our member organizations. We have been busy on an international level, with many issues. I would like to inform you of some developments.

- 1) Our much-appreciated Secretary/Assistant in the Heppenheim office, Ms. Barbara Fruth, is leaving us after four and a half years of devoted service. We wish her much success in all her future endeavors. We also welcome her successor, Ms. Uta Knorr, and wish her well.
- 2) Our hearts go out to the residents of Sri Lanka and the Philippines who have suffered in the recent floods. But even more closely, we wish to express our solidarity with people in two countries where we have member organizations—Australia and Brazil. The global climate changes we are experiencing have wreaked havoc with many communities and caused enormous loss of life and property. This makes Point no.12 of our Berlin Document all the more poignant.
- 3) As you probably know, we have a brand new Web site. There have been some glitches in the beginning, but I feel certain that they will be worked out shortly and ask for your patience. Please encourage all of your members, friends, colleagues, etc. to register at the site. This will enable you/them to receive periodic news updates about our work and about new features of the site. We would like the site to be as interactive as possible.
- 4) The last few months have been a terrible time for inter-religious relations in many parts of the world. There have been violent attacks on Christians in places including Iraq and Egypt; expressions of both anti-Semitism and Islamophobia in many parts of Europe; Jewish racism and anti-Gentile writings and demonstrations here in Israel. It's difficult internationally to keep up with all of the phenomena that require condemnation. We sincerely hope that our member organizations will respond on a local level in meaningful and appropriate ways. We in the ICCJ try to monitor these events to the best of our ability. One of the means we have to deal with the bleak reality we see reflected in the media is to make known some of the positive things that go under-reported: I recently (Jan. 17<sup>th</sup>) participated in a very moving Judaism Day service in Vienna; I know that similar things went on in Italy and in Poland.

I believe it was the theologian Hans Kung who stated that “there will be no peace among peoples until there is peace between religions.” Let us all continue to pray and work for peace among the religions.

Best wishes, Dr. Deborah Weissman, ICCJ President.