



Promoting Peace in the Face of Violence in the Name of Religion

Bilateral Israeli Rabbinate-Vatican Commission | 31.12.2016

14th Meeting: Rome, November 28 – 30, 2016. Joint Statement as follows:

1. The Catholic co-chair Cardinal Peter Turkson opened the meeting welcoming the delegations, introducing the current theme, and wishing fruitful deliberations. The Jewish co-chair Rabbi Rasson Arussi expressed thanks to the hosts and noted that this was the first meeting since the death of the founding Jewish co-chair Rabbi Shear Yashuv Cohen of blessed memory, whose leadership was indispensable for the success of this bilateral commission. At the same time he recalled the other founding co-chairs of blessed memory, Cardinal Jorge Mejía and Cardinal Georges Cottier, for their inspiring guidance. Rabbi Arussi welcomed the new member of the Jewish delegation, Rabbi Moshe Dagan, the new Director General of the Chief Rabbinate of Israel, and noted with satisfaction the decision of the Chief Rabbinate Council confirming Mr Oded Wiener as the coordinator of the Jewish delegation. Congratulations were offered on behalf of all the members of the bilateral commission to Archbishop Pierbattista Pizzaballa on his elevation to the episcopate and appointment as Apostolic Administrator of the Latin Patriarchate of Jerusalem, wishing him every success in this ministry.

2. The theme of the 14th meeting of the bilateral commission was titled “Promoting peace in the face of violence in the name of religion”. Acknowledgement was made of the tragic sins of past violence that have been perpetrated in the name of religion, and the terrible blasphemous abuse of religion in our current times that desecrates human life, and denying human liberty and difference, and posing critical challenges for our respective traditions.

3. The Catholic presentation sought to assess whether and to what extent religions can play a role in the resolution of conflicts and the construction of a new international order based on justice, peace and the care of Creation. In affirming the divine sanctity of human life, our religions demand respect for each person’s life and identity. This must be guaranteed to refugees and migrants, also by receiving them in such a way that the rights and freedoms of all are promoted.

4. The Jewish presentation surveyed the various factors that lead to aggression, violence and war, and sought to define criteria and values available in particular to the Abrahamic traditions in combatting these – specifically, the sanctity of the human person, the principle of free will, and appreciation of diversity as a reflection of the Divine Presence and Will. Notable in this regard were the words of Cardinal Augustin Bea in his comments on *Nostra Aetate* that the concept of Divine Fatherhood implies that all human beings are equal in dignity. In addition, it is incumbent on religious leadership to exercise theological humility in presenting and interpreting their respective traditions in a manner that avoids violent intent towards others.

5. In the face of the current human challenges and tragedies, the importance of religious leaders serving as an example of tolerance and respect was highlighted. Furthermore, the participants pledged to do their utmost to persuade their respective leadership to act in a most tolerant and humane manner towards the “other” and the vulnerable. In these regards the recent words of Pope Francis to representatives of different religions are particularly apposite:

May we reject the aimless paths of disagreement and closed-mindedness. May it never happen again that the religions, because of the conduct of some of their followers, convey a distorted message, out of tune with that of mercy. Sadly, not a day passes that we do not hear of acts of violence,

conflict, kidnapping, terrorist attacks, killings and destruction. It is horrible that at times, to justify such barbarism, the name of a religion or the name of God himself is invoked. May there be clear condemnation of these iniquitous attitudes that profane the name of God and sully the religious quest of mankind. May there instead be fostered everywhere the peaceful encounter of believers and genuine religious freedom (Address of Pope Francis to Representatives of Different Religions, Vatican, 3 November 2016).

6. The members of the commission called attention to and welcomed those initiatives aimed precisely at repudiating the violent abuse of religion – notably most recently the Marrakesh Summit which issued an historic declaration to protect human dignity and diversity in Muslim lands.

7. After more than a half a century of Jewish-Catholic reconciliation and fruitful dialogue, Jews and Catholics are called upon to work together to contribute to the creation of peace for the entire human family, to fulfil the words of the psalmist “Love and faithfulness meet together; righteousness and peace kiss each other” (Ps 85,11). The participants stressed the importance of education of new generations to promote peace and reciprocal respect.

8. In discussion on current issues, the principle of universal respect for the holy sites of each religion was affirmed; and note was made of attempts to deny the historical attachment of the Jewish People to its holiest site. The bilateral commission vigorously cautioned against the political and polemical denial of biblical history and called on all nations and faiths to respect this historic religious bond.

*Rome,
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Rabbi Rason Arussi (chairman of Jewish delegation)
Rabbi David Rosen
Rabbi Prof. Daniel Sperber
Rabbi Prof. Avraham Steinberg
Rabbi Moshe Dagan
Mr Oded Weiner

Peter Cardinal Turkson (chairman of Catholic delegation)
Archbishop Pierbattista Pizzaballa O.F.M.
Archbishop Bruno Forte
Bishop Giacinto-Boulos Marcuzzo
Msgr. Pier Francesco Fumagalli
Fr. Norbert J. Hoffman, S.D.B.