



SUMMARY OF SESSIONS

« First World Congress of Imams and Rabbis for Peace »

Egmont Palace, Brussels, from 3 to 6 January 2005



Armelle et Jean-Pierre Place, Jacques Toledano, André Chouraqui (Hong-Kong), Front Page agency, Création Claire Barrat, François et Christine Place

Monday 3th January 2005

Opening Session

The opening ceremony of the first World Congress of Imams and Rabbis took place yesterday evening in the Palace of Egmont, at the initiative of « Hommes de Paroles », its organizer.

This event, bringing together a hundred Imams and Rabbis from all over the world, is rich of symbols: during the opening session, all the speakers pointed out how strong a message this gathering of religious leaders around the same table was to the whole world, and the faithful of all beliefs.

Up to now, formal structure of dialogue existed between Jewish and Christians, between Christians and Muslims, but none between Jewish and Muslims.

The Congress born after a reconciliation's handshake between an Imam and a Rabbi during a meeting in Caux in april 2003, as reminded during the speech of Alain Michel, President of "Hommes de Paroles", is a first step in the Jewish-Muslim 's dialogue.

It's purpose is to initiate an exchange, a dialog between the two religious traditions without excluding the participation of the others religions, as could be seen by the presence of Christians, Protestants or Hindus, the later being represented by one of their most important spiritual master, Sri Sri Ravi Shankar, who also spoke during that inaugural session.

All speakers, rabbi Eliyahu Bakshi Doron, Rabbi René Samuel Sirat, director of the “Reciprocal knowledge of the religions of the Book and teaching of the peace” chair of the Unesco, doctor Abdulaziz Othman Atwaaijri, general director of the ISESCO, the king of Morocco, Mohamed VI, Commander of the Believers whose speech was read by his religious affairs minister, insisted on the importance for religious people to disavow all kinds of violence committed in the name of religion, especially in troubled times. In their views, political ruptures should not lead to religious troubles.

Hence, the importance of meeting and discussing to bring evidence that there is no war between beliefs. All expressed the wish to show that all believers of the various religious faiths have the common will to preserve the value of life, to find each other on the common ground of the many points which bring them together and to work for peace.

As was said in the inaugural session, the Congress is not just a meeting: it is a starting point, a launch of concrete actions which will be proposed as a result of the workshops of the next three days. The putting into practice of those projects should foster the learning of a culture of peace, of justice, in which all religious people, together, will have the desire to spread.

A delegation of women is also participating to the Congress: they represent an international movement of women for peace which is gathering millions of signatures in a call to all leaders of all religions, asking them to protect life by condemning all destructive violence committed in the name of God or of a religious principle.

Also participating to the Congress is a group of twenty high school students who came to address the Imams and Rabbis with a moving plea regarding the need to transmit a culture of peace to the future generations. “Which values do you wish to transmit? What role do you assign to your religion in society? What peace will your tradition and your texts allow us to build”. Those were some of the questions asked by the young people, and to which the religious leaders will try to bring answers.



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Tuesday 4th January 2005

First Plenary Session: The Judeo-Muslim Heritage

Moderators: Rabbi Dr Alon Goshen-Gottstein, Professor Paul Ballanfat

The congress started with the testimonies of religious people who lived or still are living in a country with a religious tradition, which is not their own. The topic reminded everybody, that highlighting examples of co-existence, exchanges and mutual fructifications are vital to continue the dialogue, open barriers, find solutions to conflicts and build bridges.

Rabbi Claude Sultan took us to Morocco, as he put it a “symbol of tolerance and open minds”, where he always experienced hospitality and fraternity. For example Muslim students in Jewish schools learn to recite the Torah, and the mutual commemoration after the death of Mohamed V at the tenth day of the holy month of Ramadan, there is no lack of proof of the rich dialogue between the two traditions.

Imam Bukhari, whose family left Uzbekistan 400 years ago for Jerusalem to found a centre of Sufism, created himself a pacifist movement which tries to uncover common bonds between Arabs and Jews in Israel. “How can the experience of our common spiritual roots help us to build peace?” This is the line along he strives to strengthen the dialogue between the inhabitants of Israel.

Other persons, other testimonies: Imam Sajid and the Chief Rabbi Sirat presented their views about their current host countries. The dialogue takes another dimension, as both religions are faced with a situation as a minority, sometimes fighting its problems. As Professor Ballanfat put it, the current situation of immigration in Europe should provide enough insights for the rapprochement between Jews and Muslims today. Imam Sajid recalled that he accidentally met a Rabbi in a

London train, in 1972. This encounter started a fruitful exchange and led at the end to a conference between Jews, Christians and Muslims. Chief Rabbi Sirat, after speaking about his painful childhood experiences in Algeria in the aftermath of the pogrom of Constantine (1934), described his present friendly and fraternal relations with the local Muslim leaders. In 1981 even a contract of Jewish-Muslim friendship was signed. He pointed out, that it is of the utmost importance for religious leaders to know each other, giving no room to syncretism or proselytes. He proposed to work out a new Charter linking the spiritual leaders together. Imam Sajid added that the current intellectual exchange unfortunately is done only on the level of the elites. He was more sceptical on how to involve all the members of society.

Professor Avi Elqayam, Professor Erol Kilic and Grand Rabbi Ariel discussed how philosophical thought and mysticism could provide a bridge between the two traditions, as it provided already in the past. Avi Elqayam wondered that if Jewish thought has created a dialogue in the West with the Christian culture, it should do so today with Islam on intellectual, philosophical and spiritual matters helping it to bring about a sort of (his terms) "revolution". History would provide plenty of examples of this fruitful rapprochements, like the history in Andalusia or in the book of Rabbi Bachya Ibn-Paquda "Duties of the Heart" – the story of a passionate encounter between Jewish and Muslim leaders. Or Egypt in the 16th century, where the son of Maimonides elaborated his thought on the philosophy of Al Ghâzzâli. Rabbi Ariel then reminded how much Muslim philosophy, based on a specific structure, has influenced Jewish writers.

Finally, Dr. Abdul Rahman Abad, pointed out that peace is not only a form but also a base. He insisted that there is an urgent need to start working immediately on concrete actions. It should start with an authentic dialogue leading to mutual understanding and with a different use of symbolic expressions: for example one should better not talk about "the wife who is not to be shared" – as Jews and Muslims like to describe their holy land, but instead using the terminology of the "mother" who can serve all its children.

All contributions with their testimonies and new proposals came up under the magic spirit of Rûmî, as Erol Kilic recited his saying "We came here to unite, not to disunite."

Second plenary Session

Knowledge, acceptance and mutual recognition: historic basis and universal aspirations

Moderators : Chief Rabbi Michael Melchior, Professor Abdelwahab Hechiche

The second plenary session looked at the ways in which religious leaders of today can open themselves to the discovery of the other in order to transcend identity-tensions that lead to conflicts.

Indeed the restricted space given to dialogue and brotherhood lead to misunderstanding: André Azuley does bemoaned this “highjacking of the word of God” and Sheikh Salou Mbacke deplored the fact that the conflict between Palestine and Israel is portrayed in religious terms. In view of this tensions between religious identities and violent it often leads to, it is urgent to restore “a space of conviviality on the playground” as André Azoulay said, thus appealing to Jews and Muslims fuelled by mutual respect to insist on the necessity of building peace.

Several speakers underlined that this peace can only be achieved by reflecting on what is common to our two traditions. The common belief in one unique God, mentioned by Chief Rabbi Doron, revelation as the source of inspiration, the shared notions of charity and prayers, quoted by Sheikh Abadi, are all uniting factors. All this converging points should offer ways of difficult situations, and be turned into a “magic mixture of intelligence, creativity, perseverance, faith and a certain naivety” to use the expression of Sheikh Abadi.

It is only through an effort of all to get to know the other in his or her specificity while sharing the same universal aspirations that this peace can be brought about. This universal message, which is found in both traditions, will help to liberate both sides from closed positions and will allow them to avoid the cliffs of a “monolithic identity” (Chief Rabbi Guedj). As man has been created as the image of God, it is important according Rabbi Brawer, for each of us to “rediscover this image of the face on the other, even if the other is not a believer or belongs to another faith”.

Furthermore, this peace can not be achieved without the mutual discovery of the difference scriptural traditions. This discovery can open the way for mutual recognition. Mahmoud Azab called the participate in a dialogue based on the study of the founding text and went as far as to encourage all to ask the difficult questions these text provoke, thus “daring to address the differences”. He also pleaded for a critical and analytical approach that will free the space for the other in the texts. Both Azab and Chief Rabbi Guedj called for a reciprocal positive criticism of the currents of thinking in both traditions.

Chief Rabbi Guedj insisted that “the mission of our religions is to help humanity emerge in its spiritual dimension”. This congress has opened the possibilities for the two traditions to know and recognize each other, both in their specificity and in their common universal message.

Workshops (First Session)

- **Texts, Truth and Violence (part 1 – reading and commentary of texts)**

Presentation of an ongoing research project focused on reinterpretation of key Jewish and Muslim texts that emphasize negative attitudes to the other.

1. Workshop in English, moderators: Rabbi Elie Khan, Sheikh Ahmad Abaadi

2. Workshop in French, moderators: Professor Albert de Pury, Rachid Benzine

Conclusions and ideas for further reflection from the participants of the Workshop in French

1. Where is violence found: in the texts or in the interpretation of the texts?
2. It is not possible to discuss the texts without putting them into their historic context: a scientific challenge would be to put in brackets the theological element when reading the texts.
Remark: violence is inherent to life and can therefore not be eradicated. Violence is always linked to a given context.
3. Increase the space given to women, as half of humanity is still too absent from such meetings while they are subjected to awful abuse and violence.
4. The real conflict is not between Judaism and Islam, but is a conflict of the Middle East. Leaving politics at the door is therefore no solution.
5. Praising doubt: Be aware of certainties that are not eternal. Truth is a continuous path not a static fact.
6. Learning the language of the other.
7. What is there in my tradition that violates you?—both sides should ask each other this question.
8. Hermeneutics is not enough: we need a new kind of ethical hermeneutics.

- **Brain storming and propositions on education of Imams and Rabbis**

Brain storming on the creation of educational structures to improve and complement the education of Imams and Rabbis. Topics will include frameworks, places, contents and participants.

Moderators: Chief Rabbi René–Samuel Sirat, Dr Adamou Ndam Njoya

Recommendations:

1. Statement that the current education system is a failure
2. Men of religion do not intend to substitute to politics
3. Only exception: if moral and spiritual values are concerned

Examples: cardinal de Saliège under the Vichy regime, Pasteur Boegner, Grand Rabbi Kaplan or Si Kadour

4. important to define precisely the role of men of religion in society
5. status between countries and religions
6. Education program:
 - general education : master as minimum
 - specialized education :
 - theology, law, etc.
 - also social sciences : sociology, history, philosophy, economy, ethics, etc.
7. Cooperation in educational matters :
 - summer interns
 - facilitate access of educational systems to other religions and other states
 - create educational institutions in different regions
 - create an institution in Jerusalem
8. Education of top leaders in management and politics of theological values

Points of discussion:

9. Defining the role of women and their place
10. Failure of politics in conflict resolution and role of inter-religious institutions
11. A Belgian participant reminded about the oppressions of the state on religious leaders, especially with relation to their countries of origin
12. Urgency of action plan

• **« Abraham's Vision »**

Extracts of the book "Vision of Abraham," that narrates the historical, religious and cultural links between Islam and Judaism in a simple way, will be discussed in order to reach consensus upon an ultimate common text. The book has already been endorsed by some twenty Muslim and Jewish scholars and activists. Analysing the text during this workshop will prompt both communities to undertake a focussed and strenuous work towards the development of a common narrative of their history in a form both attractive and easily understandable by the general public. The workshop will allow a great number of Jewish and Muslim personalities to further develop and thoroughly complete this work to which many have already contributed.

Moderators : Ed Miller, Xavier Guerrand Hermès

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Jewish and Muslim personalities to further develop and thoroughly complete this work to which many have already contributed.

Conclusion

The simplicity of the book makes it accessible to all. It will fill a void of knowledge regarding the many links between the two religions.

They have common roots: the same Abrahamic faith.

The figure of Abraham represents humanity: hope, justice, love (the love of God and of the love of His son). It symbolises the freedom of the whole of humanity.

- **“Brain storming on sharing and transmitting without proselytizing.”**

What kind of structures could be set within Judaism and Islam to promote a universal message while avoiding the identity tensions? How such universal message exempt of proselytism can be transmitted?

1. Moderators: Chief Rabbi Marc–Raphaël Guedj, Patrice Brodeur

Recommendations:

1. Include into the final statement the right to transmit without any pressure nor violence the values of peace inherent to the religious traditions.
2. Initiate joined actions in regions of tension.
3. Enhance the inter–religious dialogues where they are already going on and where they are absent, develop inter–religious training.

Example: religious institutions for higher education, denominational schools.

2. Moderators: Sheikh Abdelwahid Felice Pallavicini, Rabbi Reuven Firestone

Summary statements on structures, activities, and attitudes necessary to succeed in this endeavour. These statements were suggested by the participants without vote. These are recommendations to our Jewish and Muslim religious leaders and educators.

- We must educate our children to know enough of our own religious traditions not to be threatened when confronted by religious people who believe in other faiths.
- We must educate our children to respect other paths to the One God.
- We need to locate authoritative texts that teach respect for the other in our respective religious traditions. Authoritative texts and commentary are necessary for this to succeed.
- We need to work in our own communities, both Jewish and Muslim, to reduce the negative stereotypes of the other.
- We need to explore ways within our communities to engage in some kinds of inter–faith celebrations, but in ways that do not distort our particular traditions to accommodate the other.
- We need to learn how to articulate and publicly respect our commonalities.

- We need to publicly assert the need for the other to exist (never to begrudge the other).
- When engaging in dialogue, we must demonstrate solidarity with our partners of the religious other to help them feel secure in dialogue.
- We need to work together on common problems in our communities.
- We need to make sure that our educators are teaching our true religious respect for others who are different. We need to manage difficult verses or our scriptures so that our children and congregations do not misunderstand their meanings.
- We need to respect the enthusiasm of the religious other who may understand that his tradition teaches to publicly witness.
- We need to articulate "Da`wa" or our love for the beauty and magnificence of our own religion in a non-coercive manner.
- We must invite religious leaders of the other faith to make statements in our own places of worship.
- We need to publicize the positive of the religion of the other amongst our own religionists.

A centre for dialogue has been opened in Milan that will concentrate on the metaphysics of inter-relationships between religions.



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Wednesday 5th January 2005

Third Plenary Session (part 1):

The Dignity of the Human person: a common value

Moderators: Chief Rabbi David Rosen, Dr Adamou Ndam Njoya

At this third and last Session participants tried to show that human dignity is a central issue. They reflected how the Holy Scriptures calling for respect of dignity could influence the educational systems and help to overcome conflicts and intolerance.

High Rabbi Guiqui reminded us that in the Torah you could find three times the word of “love” – love your neighbour, love the stranger, love God. This order is important, as it shows that love of one’s neighbour means also the love of God. Rabbi Rosen and Rabbi Lau showed that as we all were created by God and that the respect that we show to the other is the same that we show to ourselves and to our God. For Sheikh Bentounes the dignity of the human being was sacred and linked to the dignity of life.

This call for dignity is intransigent: neither conflict nor war can justify the application of another ethic than that of dignity, as Rabbi Rothenberg recalled. He underlined that the dangers of the ‘dehumanisation of the enemy’, as formulated in the theories of Carl Schmitt according to whom all national identity is founded on a common enemy. On the contrary it is necessary to listen to the Torah that above all considers an enemy as a human being.

Sheikh Pallavicini evoked the manner in which spiritual force induces respect for human values: it allows each believer to pursue his quest in himself and in others, as “God is in us all”. Bearing this in mind discredits all those who have an exclusive vision that ends in ghettos and even conflicts. He called upon religious leaders to set up ways of transmitting

clearly “the different manner in interpreting the knowledge of true human nature”. Included in these he himself advanced the idea of a “Euro–Oriental Institute” with the goal of including the “spiritual roots of mankind in the development of the civil society”.

“Is there anything better than good? Yes, doing it well”: these words of Sheikh Bentounes summarized the essence of these contributions, which insist on the respect of the other that all religious traditions call for, have opened possible paths to put an end to conflicts and intolerance.

Third plenary Session (part 2): Open testimonies from several Imams and Rabbis

Moderators: Rabbi Dr Alon Goshen – Gottstein, Dr Faouzi Skali

The object of this session is to create the possibility for each of us to react personally to ideas held and to freely express ourselves as to the themes and objectives of the meeting.

Chief Rabbi Joseph Azran:

Does an absolute meeting point exist? According to the Bible we can compare the light of God with the human soul. Now, whether it is light or the flame of a candle, all that rises converges. This soul was created in the image of God. Every human being has the possibility of reaching ethical qualities similar to the image of God. The soul is like the flame of a candle, a bright light reaching to heaven. As participants of this congress I suggest that we compare our expectations as a huge group of candles in magnificent harmony, illuminating humanity. I hope that we shall be able to work for the future and reach realistic conclusions in a broad perspective.

Chief Rabbi Shlush:

The wise men pretend that nobody is perfect. Let us look at this congress not as a glass that is half empty, but half full. If we can concentrate on all the positive aspects discovered during the course of this congress, why should we not find the will to resolve the problems we are confronted with in the Middle East?

Rabbi Soetendorp:

As a child during World War II, I was saved by a Catholic German woman. This made me sensitive to stigmatizing others for the rest of my life. There are numerous examples but in saying that I think in particular about the murder of a film producer recently in the Netherlands by a Muslim, who had contributed to stigmatizing Muslims and associating them with terrorists. In each conflict, I can feel the suffering in both camps. I think that we should act first in the name of life to put an end to this suffering.

Rabbi Alan Unterman:

The Bible is a challenge, just as this conference is. Because, above all, we must go further than mere words.

Sheikh Hassan Chizenga:

Even if this conference could not take place in a Jewish or Arab country, it has been able to take place here. In this we comply with the Koran, who tells us of a table dressed for all of humanity assembled together. Thanks to this congress, we know that this is possible.

Rabbi Sugarmann:

I would just like to say concerning the tidal wave that has caused the disaster in south East Asia, we could together be a positive wave by joining together in prayer.

Sheikh Mahi:

I fear the political correctness around this table. Real life happens is played out on the ground. We can read in the Koran that if God had not wanted diversity, it would not have been created. So let us not fear raising difficult questions, we should confront them together against deforming ethics. That is the real challenge. But let us remember the proverb: "The heart is the artisan of change".

Sheikh Kadi Dawoud Zini:

In the United States, I live in a building where I am the only Muslim among 29 Jewish families. Therefore I want to bring testimony that we can live together if we share respect for the other. I am a Judge and in my professional life I am surrounded by Christians and Rabbis. It is not unusual that we are invited to share different religious holidays up to six times a year. We should be aware that real exchange is based on an effective dialogue and concrete actions.

Rabbi Levy of Florence

I call for a new conference in Florence, in order to continue this work and constitute groups that work at a local level. I also call for the creation of a dictionary for Jewish and Muslim terms.

Sheikh Koudous:

It is very important to acquire a better comprehension of the Holy texts. To transmit our message of peace we Muslims and Jews and Muslims should first understand each other better. We have a great responsibility there. To be able to accomplish our mission we have to fulfil three conditions: 1. Be truthful and accept the truth, 2. Be sincere with God, with ourselves and with others, 3. Be patient and obedient.

Rabbi Sarfati:

This meeting demands from us all an enormous effort, we should be able transcend our own ethnic origins and our own religion. I call on Judeo-Muslim friendship and I would like to say that I have taken the initiative of promoting this friendship in France together with the television channel TF1.

Workshops (second session)

All workshops have shown their wish perpetuate the spirit of this meeting in time and space, and have thought over the means to achieve this. The aim is see that the proposals put forward during the congress are followed through to their completion.

- **“ Project for the Creation of an Observatory”**

Moderator: Daniel Shek

Proposals:

1. To create a permanent observatory composed of the three monotheistic religions, be it physically (in a given geographic place) or virtually (with a network of contacts), that would be responsible for monitoring events across the world.
2. The creation of a crises or emergency cell within the Observatory which could formulate and transmit a unified message from the three religious traditions whenever a conflict arises.
3. The constitution of a committee of religious representatives and members of different organisations that will draft the basic principals for the creation of the observatory.
4. In order to sustain the momentum created at the Congress all participants are requested to try to create a local core-team that could react rapidly, in the case of need, so that the Observatory could quickly draw on these resources of good will whenever needed.

- **”The Challenge for Peace”**

Moderator:

Proposals:

1. The need to consider and address the problems raised by extremism, which represents the greatest evil.
2. Consider and reflect on the difficulties caused by a lack of democracy in the Arab and Muslim world.
3. Encourage the intra-religious dialogue between the different currents within each tradition (for example in Islam between the Sunnis-Shiites-Sufis and Wahhabites and Salafists).

- **“The Generation of Peace”**

Moderators: Marc–Alain Ouaknin, Rachid Benzine

Proposals:

1. A project for a handbook on the three monotheistic religions, covering ten points (around the figure of Abraham, the prophets, the notion of the Book/Books, etc.). The handbook has already received the promise of support from the French Ministry of Education.
2. The project of organising seminars around certain given themes such as the interpretation of sacred texts. Certain of the participants have already agreed to take part in such discussions.
3. Discussion concerning the teaching tools and supports required to introduce the teaching of religious concepts in schools, notably in the French secular system.
4. The initiation of a project organising meetings between Jewish and Koranic schools, to eliminate the prejudices that exist between people who know nothing of each other.
5. The project for a visit to Morocco to meet Moroccan students to exchange ideas and thoughts on the work of “Generation of Peace”.

- **“Social Responsibility practiced with charity”**

Moderator:

Recommandations

1. The notions of compassion and charity that exist in each of the three traditions needs to be reflected by concrete actions.
2. Each community should accomplish these actions beyond its own community.
3. Proposals for joint action by Jews and Muslims to bring support victims of the Tsunami.

- **“Future issues”**

Moderators:

1. To avoid religious leaders remaining in a confrontational theological discourse without really touching on the practical aspects, while at the same time avoiding the dangers of the opposite which would be to accept a purely pragmatic approach.
2. To try to reconcile a religious identity, bearing all that is sacred, and activities in the secular domain (politics for example).

- **“Sufism”**

Moderators:

1. Spirituality is an essential bridge between religion and feelings; therefore it has to be developed within a framework of dialogue.
2. A Sufi Centre exists in Nazareth: proposition for meetings to be held there.

- **“Abraham’s Vision”**

Moderators: Ed Miller, Xavier Guerrand Hermès

1. The project for a tour circuit called “Abraham’s voyage”, starting from the UK to Israel and then to Mecca.

- **Creative Workshop to bring a religious dimension to Peace in the Middle– East**

Moderator: Rabbi Shmuel Jajobowits

1. The need to work with the universities and governmental organisations.
2. The proposal to invite Rabbis to the annual Grand Meeting of American Muslims that gathers some 400.000 persons.
3. The creation of a data base for contacts between us whenever conflicts arise.

- **“Workshop on “Friendship and Hospitality”**

Moderators: Father Christian Delorme, Chief Rabbi Abba Samoun

Recommendations:

1. Trying to meet together without proselytisation.
2. Create convivial meeting places where different religious communities can meet and discover each other.
3. A further series of suggestions are being formulated and will be sent in the coming weeks.

Fourth plenary Session

Moderators: Chief Rabbi Marc-Raphaël Guedj, Sheikh Ahmed Abaadi

Two questions were put to the Assembly of Rabbis and Imams.

First question

How can extremism be fought within our own communities?

Suggestions were requested concerning the means that are necessary to facilitate dialogue, education, attitudes, so as to bring extremists together with moderates.

During the talks, the most recurrent word is “**dialogue**”; dialogue at the heart of each community and with communities of the other religion.

Chief Rabbi Marc Raphael Guedj, who introduced the question, insisted on the courage to dialogue and on the importance of considering that the moderates are totally legitimate vis-à-vis the extremists.

Basky Quraishy talked about the need for a continuous dialogue between Rabbis and Imams, between Israelis and Palestinians, between Jews and Muslims. He proposed the creation of a platform between communities in the European Union, to fight both anti-Semitism and Islamophobia.

Chief Rabbi Laurent Berros reiterated the importance of being able to talk to those who listen to the extremists, to find a way into those communities and to be able to talk with them so as to make heard a moderate point of view.

In order to illustrate his ideas he told recounted an anecdote concerning an experience in a Parisian suburb. Chief Rabbi Berros was walking around a market in a mainly Muslim neighbourhood, accompanied by the Imam when he was hit by an egg thrown by some children. The Imam asked one of them whether he was a Muslim. Then he explained why what he had just done was contrary to Islam. Not content to listen and understand, the child apologized to the Rabbi.

In the same spirit, Eliyahu McLean encouraged each of us not to demonize the extremist, but to include him in the dialogue using the means provided by Judaism and Islam, in the Jewish and Muslim cultures.

The question of education was discussed as a means of combating extremism. Dialogue should take place through a profound knowledge of religious sources. Imam Abduljalil Sajid suggested that clerics and professors be trained specifically to fight all forms of extremisms.

Chief Rabbi Melchior also reminded the Assembly of the importance of working first and foremost within one's own community. He recalled the difficulty for certain members of the various communities, to accept the presence of their religious leader at a meeting such as this.

The accent was put on the need to organise between orthodoxies and not with the various sects.

As the Grand Rabbi Guedi and Rabbi François Garai underlined taking the example of the Soufi prayer, the tensions related to identity will not occur religion is taken at its root, in **spiritual experience**. In this context, faith, before the presence of God, cannot engender extremism.

A participant affirmed that he who has God before him cannot kill in His name. Is he greater than God, he who kills a man that God Himself has created?

Rabbi Garaï talked about the need to pray together, in order to become nearer the religion of the other in a considerate and inner way.

Chief Rabbi Bent Melchior referred to the Pentateuch, where he is repeatedly asked to “love the stranger” and not just his neighbour.

“True spiritual formation does not foster extremism”. From this affirmation comes the responsibility of the religious leaders to explain the Torah and the Koran “as Almighty God wants us to do”, said Chief Rabbi Yosefe Hadane, Rabbi of the Ethiopian Jews in Israel.

Common sources are a source of unity. They talk of the dignity of Man, of relations with the Other. The public at large is insufficiently aware of this. It is necessary spread awareness of those common sources, reiterated a Rabbi; they send a message contrary to that of extremism.

We need, commencing with that which unites us, beyond our specificities, a powerful symbol around which we can act and unite our forces said Rabbi Rivon Richard Krygier. He suggested creating this symbol in a sensitive location: the Dome of the Rock and Al-Aqsa Mosque esplanade. He put forward the idea of making it THE central point of monotheism, a non-political place, belonging neither to a religion nor a State, a place of religious neutrality.

Several participants called on the **media** to join in the fight against extremism. A participant underlined that too often, the media prefer to diffuse a culture of fear rather than to give a platform to the voices of moderation, which could contribute to reconciliation. The openness that exists in religious thinking, he said, was too often marginalised in the media. Since we are openly united in certain circumstances, let us not be afraid of being seen side by side. Rabbi François Garaï recalled the inter-religious panels that were held relative to great disasters like the Twin Towers tragedy.

A call was made by one of the participants concerning a common declaration to the press. He called on all men of religion to unite to defend the weak in a clear and unambiguous voice, to condemn violence and crime committed in the name of religions.

Another participant condemned the silence of both Imams and Rabbis when violence is committed in the name of their religion. As he affirmed, religious leaders should be examples to their communities. He considered silence as a real failure and proposed the creation of an organisation assembling representatives of all religions of the world, which would publicly condemn crime perpetrated in the name of a religion.

Certain **images** have been evoked, speaking of unity and contradicting extremism: religions are complex and diverse phenomena; they are polychromic and like a mosaic, participate in unity. There is no “yes” or “no” answer, as think extremists. Things are complex, says Professor *Bary Levy*

Another image evoked was that of the “eye”, the two eyes, the left and the right, leading to one vision, that is to say seeing one God.

For certain speakers, **politics** has a role to play against extremism. A participant proposed applying pressure on the governments of countries and places where violence and extremism exist, by creating a dialog with high level, enlightened political representatives.

Second question

- a) How to make a success out of event? Its success will be measured by the fruits it bears.
- b) What can be said to our communities to convince them to become partners in our determination to change the world?

The suggestions put forward were realistic and substantial.

Professor Reuven Firestone affirmed that actions will speak more convincingly to our communities. In the communities where Jews and Muslims live side by side, he suggested seeking a leader of the other religion and to work with him on a regular basis, to study together texts, scriptures, commentaries, traditions to learn to respect one and another. The people will watch us and it will become known.

One participant made a number of proposals. Among them the respect for honesty, the encouragement to dialogue from the earliest age to university, the support institutions that collaborate in inter-religious dialogue.

Another participant wished Palestinians and Israelis could meet more often even in times of war. He recommends the creation of a permanent committee that could react to violence in real time.

It was then suggested that a network be created between the participants to this meeting, simply as a means of keeping in contact, continuing to communicate, and to work together at different levels. As was said by one of the participants, "If each religious leader here keeps in touch with only one religious leader from the other religion, we can continue what was started here which is not a dream but a reality and a starting point".

Sheikh Kalid Abu-Ras spoke of the « children of Abraham », created to develop tolerance among Jewish and Muslims youth throughout the world. He suggests encouraging this type of initiative that teaches the children to look at others in a positive manner.

Dr Esmail Koushanpour gave two **examples** of cooperation between religious communities and the fruit that dialogue with the other could bear. He recounted that in answer to the request of a Rabbi without a Synagogue, during the construction of the building, Jews of the community were invited to pray in the Mosque of Chicago over several months. And that is how the Chief Rabbi of Israel was received in the same mosque.

The other example concerned the aftermaths of the 11 September. A Mosque in South of Chicago was the target of demonstrations. Now, over several years the community had established a recurrent dialogue with a Christian religious leader. Grieved by the events he decided to organise a human chain of Catholics in order to protect the Mosque during the Friday prayer.

The need to **separate politics and religion in the dialogue between religions** was evoked by Chief Rabbi Yacov Ariel. According to him, men of religion distrust politicians because their way of thinking is too different. Men of religion on the other hand, have a great facility to finding a common language. It seemed preferable to him to favorise a maximum of direct

dialogue between men of religious so that in a further phase they could influence politicians from a more collective and institutional point of view.

“To put into motion the dialogue between the sons of Adams, means keeping to religion”, said Dr Abdul Rahman Abad and to concentrate on **love for the other**. It is a question of the religious in our own spirit to reinforce the religious concept of love for the other and to men people to turn away from hate. This same person, the only one, also suggested the participation of women in this approach, and whose absence in this dialogue he regretted. A suggestion that was followed by applause.

In conclusion, the **personal improvement of each one** was evoked as the essential starting point for all action. One of the participants recalled, “Start by changing yourself and through that you will change your family, your community, your town...” Finding more love in our hearts is the key to all change.

Spiritual and intellectual betterment. Rabbi Irving Yitz Greenberg of New York also spoke of improving one’s own conduct, one’s own faith in referring to the scriptures then sharing its wealth with others. He underlined the importance of undertaking work for a better understanding of our own traditions that lead us to respect the other and manage together subjects such a for example suffering.

The Sheikh Bukhari proposed that the next meeting takes place in Tashkent. Regarding the difficulties experienced between the two religions, he spoke of a simple obstacle on the road to a long future together.

Conclusions

Sheikh Abaadi, co-moderator with Chief Rabbi Guedj asked Professor Mohammed Yessif to draw the first conclusions.

The professor insisted on the fact that this formidable meeting between Imams and Rabbis is in itself a victory, a progress, a noble action, a new avenue for dialogue.

According to him, before speaking of extremism, it is necessary to study and understand one’s own roots. It is important to transmit to students a just understanding and not let them speak in the place of their masters.

Sheikh Ahmed Abaadi concluded on the courageous initiative of changing by one’s self.

Chief Rabbi Marc Raphael Guedj called upon each one to go beyond his boundaries to speak to his community, to convert himself to the presence of the other, to the other as our fellow man, and to peace. He concluded by these luminous words “the divine presence as enlightenment brings us spirituality, in the same manner, the presence of the other as enlightenment brings us peace”.

The session was ended with a Jewish hymn, started by Rabbi Alon Goshen-Gottstein “Father, bless us all as one in the light of your countenance,” the air without words was taken up by all participants.



« First World Congress of Imams and Rabbis for Peace »

Egmont Palace, Brussels, from 3 to 6 January 2005

Thursday 6th January 2005

Closing Ceremony:

From January 3 to 6, 2005, one hundred Imams and Rabbis, surrounded by personalities from all over the world, met under the high patronage of His Majesty Albert II and His Majesty Mohammed VI in order to outlaw all forms of violence committed in the name of God or of any religious principle. In addition the representatives of Jewish and Muslim communities in Africa, Asia, Europe, the Middle East and America affirmed their determination to develop dialogues and co-operation between Islam and Judaism.

The Congress ended with the solemn commitment of the religious representatives to persevere on the road of dialogue on which they set out in coming to this congress, in particular through a series of suggested concrete actions. They also pledged not to allow their silence to condone any kind of violent acts committed in the name of their respective religions. Each participant promised to transmit to their respective communities a message of peace and to promote encounters and dialogues between the communities. Throughout the days twenty high-school students from a Parisian suburb brought their testimonies; their questions and thoughts to the discussions. Their presence met the need expressed by all for the implication of the future generations in this historical process of openness and discovery of the other:

During the closing session of the congress, the "Alliance of Women for Peace" launched an appeal urging religious leaders of the entire world to de-legitimise all forms of violence perpetrated in the name of God or on behalf of any religious principle".

After the reading of the final declaration in the four languages of the congress (French, English; Arab and Hebrew), the meeting ended with a moving scene of Rabbis and Imams holding each other by the hand as a sign of the perspectives all are keen to promote together. They announced the creation of a standing committee of Imams and Rabbis with the obvious mandate of publicly condemning any Islamophobic, anti-Semitic or other racist act committed in any part of the world. They will also initiate and co-ordinate concrete actions based on the principles of the final declaration of the congress.



FINAL DECLARATION 'FIRST WORLD CONGRESS OF IMAMS AND RABBIS FOR PEACE'

Egmont Palace, Brussels, January 3 to 6, 2005

We, leaders, representatives, Rabbis and Imams of Muslim and Jewish religious communities who have assembled from all over the world for the first World Congress of Imams and Rabbis for Peace affirm our commitment to strive to end all bloodshed and attacks against innocent human beings that offend the right to life and dignity given by the Almighty to all human beings.

- 1) We call upon all people to combat hate, ignorance and their causes and to build together a world of peace, rich in diversity, in which all faiths and their practices are respected and protected.
- 2) We call upon the political leaders of all peoples to work for righteous and peaceful durable solutions around the world and in particular in the Holy Land for the benefit of all peoples and faith-communities who live in that land and hold it dear.
- 3) We pledge ourselves to pursue a shared goal of respect for human rights for all people and peoples, without which no peace can be possible.
- 4) We call upon all religious leaders in Jewish and Muslim congregations around the world to devote regular sermons and addresses to their communities on the importance of inter-religious respect and reverence for all human life under all circumstances.
- 5) We announce the establishment of a permanent joint committee to help implement these commitments and propose programmatic initiatives on a regular basis, in keeping with the proposals presented during the congress and in its spirit for the wellbeing of all peoples.

Editorial Board and provisory joint committee: Sheikh Ahmed Abaadi, Director of the Islamic affairs in Morocco, Chief Rabbi Joseph Azran, Chief Rabbi Av Beth-Din of Rishon Letzion, Chief Rabbi Shear Yashuv Cohen, Chief Rabbi of Haifa, Sheikh Kone Idriss Koudouss, President of the national council of imams, Mr Alain Michel, founder of Hommes de Parole, Dr Ndam Njoya, Coordinator of the Islamic Higher Council of Cameroun, President-founder of the Islamic and Religious Studies Institute, International Co-President of the World Conference of Religions for Peace, Chief Rabbi David Rosen, International Director of interreligious Affairs at the Jewish Committee, International President of the World Conference of Religions for Peace, Sheikh Talal Sedir, Imam of Hebron, former Palestinian Authority Representative for Interreligious Affairs, Mr Oded Wiener, Director General of the Chief Rabbinate of Israel