

Wisdom

The Newsletter of the Elijah Interfaith Institute

Dear Friend,

I am pleased to update you on the Elijah Interfaith Institute's recent activities. I hope you enjoy this month's *Wisdom* e-newsletter.

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News Update - Imams and Rabbis for Peace, Brussels, January 3-6

The Elijah Interfaith Institute could not have wished for a more successful event than that which took place in Brussels. Responsible for all content, programming and facilitation of the plenary and work shop discussions, Elijah received enormous recognition and praise for the excellence of its work, throughout the three days of the congress. We can offer you no better feel for the Brussels experience than to reproduce the article by noted journalist, Daniel Ben-Simon.

Rabbis and imams unite against religious extremism

By Daniel Ben-Simon

BRUSSELS - A few minutes before Europe observed three minutes of silence last Wednesday in memory of the tsunami victims, Jewish and Muslim clergy who had convened at Egmont Palace decided to join them. Two days earlier, the clergy had come together to seek means of greater involvement for religion in quietening the bloody Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

At exactly noon, all the participants got to their feet around the tables in the magnificent conference hall. Rabbis and imams, along with several Christian clerics, stood side by side and bowed their heads in utter silence.



Suddenly, Rabbi Shlomo Chelouche, the chief rabbi of Haifa, recited a short prayer for the victims. When he finished, all those present said "amen."

Then Zimer Omar Farouk Turan, the former mufti of Istanbul, recited verses from the Koran. No sooner did he finish than Rabbi Yosef Azran, chief rabbi of Rishon Letzion, chanted a psalm, his voice choked with tears. When the moments of silence were over, the hundreds of clergy in the room remained standing. Some wiped away a tear.

"This proves that rabbis and imams can work together for a common goal," said Rabbi Rene Sirat, the former chief rabbi of France. "In all my years as a rabbi, I never experienced a moment like this," Sirat added, invoking the traditional Jewish blessing for reaching a special milestone.

Hojat al-Islam Muhammad Mehatali, a senior Iranian cleric, looked at his colleagues in amazement. "These moments were the cream of the whole conference," he said. "Where have you ever seen Muslims and Jews praying as if they were one family?"

There was no shortage of moving moments during the unprecedented "Rabbis and Imams for Peace" conference, which was sponsored by the organization Hommes de Parole. The conference hosted more than 200 rabbis and imams as well as Christian clergy from all over the world to convey the message that religion does not send people out to kill and that anyone who takes a life in the name of religion transgresses a commandment of God.

The conference concluded on Friday with a pledge that the Jewish and Muslim clerics would work to put an end to bloodshed between Israelis and Palestinians and would struggle with all their might against hatred, ignorance and extremism on both sides. When the declaration was read, the participants got to their feet and applauded.

The delegates grew close during the conference. Rabbis who had never met an imam spoke freely with them during the meetings.



At first, they ate at separate tables - Jews here, Muslims there, eyeing each other suspiciously. A day later they had moved closer; a day after that, they were sitting together and even taking pictures arm in arm.

By Wednesday, they were praising each other's faith. "We are all the children of one father - Abraham the Patriarch," said Rabbi Eliyahu Bakshi Doron.

Sheikh Talal Sidr of Hebron moved the audience when he called on them to visit every mosque and synagogue to preach peace and dignity. "This is the divine commandment; we must educate a generation to peace and love," he said.

"How is it that every Jewish prayer ends with the word peace and every Muslim prayer ends with the word peace and we are killing each other?" asked Sheikh Abdul Jalil Sajid, the imam of Brighton, England.

Rabbi Yaakov Ariel, chief rabbi of Ramat Gan and a leading opponent of disengagement, surprised the audience with his conciliatory tone. "Judaism and Islam have a common task," he said, "to bring a message to the whole world. Don't we all have one father? So why should we hurt each other?"

The imams represented most of the countries of Africa and Asia, dressed in traditional robes and head coverings in a rainbow of colors. The former president of Indonesia, Abdul Rahman Wahid, canceled his participation because of the tsunami damage to his country.

"The extremists have taken God hostage," said Andre Azoulay, adviser to the king of Morocco. "Unfortunately they are stronger than the Jewish and Muslim people of peace." Participants made great efforts to distance themselves from the horrors perpetrated by fanatics in the name of God.

Paramount during the conference was the clergy's desire to participate in the political process. Several noted that without religious legitimization, no political agreement will last and realizing that if they do not rein in the extremists, the latter might touch off a powder keg of religious hatred that will ignite the whole region.

At the end of the conference, participants held hands and sang *Haveinu Shalom Aleichem*, a Hebrew song of peace. "We made history," said Alain Michel, a French Christian and president of *Hommes de Parole*.

Sharing Reflections - Remembering David Chappell

Elijah notes with great sadness the death of David Chappell at age 64. David was a long-time associate and supporter of Elijah's activities and a founding member of "The Crisis of the Holy" Think Tank. In his memory we present, in part, the following memory of a fellow distinguished scholar, Professor Majid Tehranian,

David Chappell and I met at the University of Hawaii where we were both teaching. His smiling face, his gentle manners, and his engaging conversation were great attractions to anyone meeting him. He radiated an inner peace and a loving heart. At the time, he was deeply engaged in a project on Buddhist-Islamic dialogue. I told him about my trip along the ancient Silk Road and the historical encounters between the Buddhist and Islamic traditions. He told me about his collaboration with Sulak Sivaraksa in peace building in Southeast Asia. We both considered human civilization to be a common journey among the great religious and philosophical



traditions....

David's numerous scholarly publications introduced the idea of "engaged Buddhism," which spoke not only to a major Buddhist trend but also to his own social concerns and engagements.... David's modesty betrayed the fact that he was a personal friend of some of the leading intellectual figures of our times. In the late 1990s, David and I collaborated in planning an international conference in Okinawa focused on a dialogue among civilizations. He was indispensable in bringing together a group of prominent spokespersons of the Hindu, Buddhist, Confucian, Judaic, Christian, Islamic, and secular humanist traditions. The conference was held in February 2000, and a book emerged out of it shortly thereafter. At David's invitation, Hans Kung wrote the introduction to the book.... The book is now being used as textbook in some university courses around the world. That is where David's legacy will find its greatest resonance. I can think of no greater tribute to David's legacy than to continue the dialogue among civilizations that he so beautifully lived and promoted.

Majid Tehranian

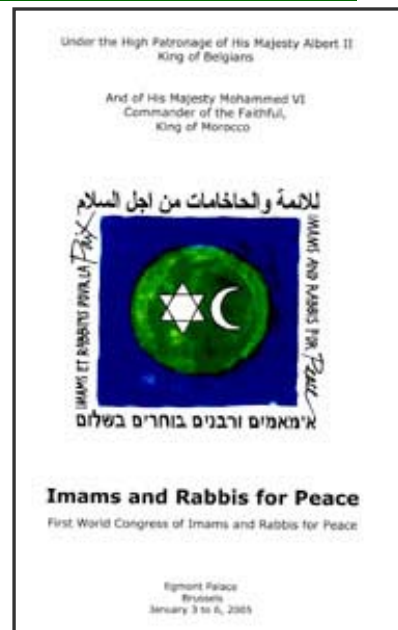
University of Hawaii at Manoa

Toda Institute for Global Peace and Policy research

Honolulu, 5 December 2004

Getting Involved – A Special Imams and Rabbis for Peace Offer

For a limited time only we are delighted to be able to offer recipients of our newsletter the opportunity to receive a copy of "Judaism and Islam: Directions for Dialogue, Collaboration and Mutual Recognition". This groundbreaking work in interfaith dialogue, developed by a think tank of eminent Islamic and Jewish scholars, was produced especially for the First World Congress of Imams and Rabbis for Peace, held in Brussels, January 3rd through 6th, 2005. The work, in English, French, Arabic and Hebrew, received enthusiastic praise from the Congress participants. We are now offering, to all donors who contribute US \$20.00 or more to the Institute's ongoing activities, a free official copy of this publication in acknowledgment of their support.



Donations can be made at <http://www.elijah.org.il/participate/donate.shtml> or by sending a check to our administrative offices:

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