

Report from the 23rd Catholic-Jewish committee meeting

Written by Anouk



The 23rd meeting of the International Catholic-Jewish Liaison Committee (ILC) took place in Warsaw, 4-7 April 2016 and our Brother Bent Melchior attended the meeting. We have the pleasure to reproduce his report below:

4-7 April 2016 I had the honor to represent BBE at a meeting of the International Catholic-Jewish Liaison Committee (ILC) in Warsaw. ILC holds biennial meetings since 1971. The Catholic representatives are appointed from the Pontifical Commission of the Holy See for Religious Relations with the Jews. The head of the delegation in Warsaw was Cardinal Kurt

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Koch, who is appointed by the Pope as the official contact person on matters related to the Jewish world. Most of the non- Polish delegates were European, but there were also delegates from Israel, Brasil and USA.

The Jewish participants come from International Jewish Committee on Interreligious Consultations (IJCIC), which was established by 12 organizations, most of them American. There are religious bodies from both orthodox, conservative and reform Jewry as well as American Jewish Committee, ADL, World Jewish Congress and BBI. The head of the Jewish participants was Mr. Martin Budd, who is the chairman of ADL in USA. The BBI was represented by David Michaels, the Director of International Affairs. Apart from the Polish participants and observers we were two Europeans, of which one is representative of American Jewish Committee to the Holy See. Not one person from the bigger Jewish communities in France, UK or Germany. I was the only real European and was proud to represent BBE.

The subjects of the meeting were The "Other" in Jewish and Catholic Tradition and Refugees in Today's World. To protect and even love the stranger is an often repeated obligation in both the Jewish Bible and the New Testament. Several speakers had made research on the subject and gave us learned lectures on how to understand and implement these obligations in our time. Pope Francis was quoted often as a voice from the religious world taking action in the political field.

The deliberations focused on the practical and moral challenges of the refugee crisis overwhelming much of Europe today, with an emphasis on how the two religious communities might provide support for all those, who suffer as a result of armed conflicts. Additionally, the alarming increase of anti-Semitism and the violent persecution of Christians in many parts of the world were discussed. Participants also addressed the situation of Catholics and Jews in Poland, both historically and present.

The delegates visited the Nazi concentration camp Treblinka to confirm their commitment to preserve the memory of the Holocaust. At the opening ceremony the Yad Vashem "Righteous Among the Nations" recognition was bestowed posthumously upon three Polish individuals. The program also included a guided tour of POLIN Museum of the History of Polish Jews. Unfortunately, I could not participate in these tours, which were too difficult for my legs to overcome.

It is in itself an important situation that the two religious communities conduct a dialogue. The question is, whether we could let some kind of action follow the many nice words. We are talking a lot about refugees and Muslims. I suggested – again – that we should not only talk about these people, but also talk with them. Invite representatives to our meetings and let them present their case to us. The new problems for the Christians in many Muslim countries could be an area, where we could join in action. It was my feeling that there was a fear of pointing too direct towards the Muslim community and place responsibility for the persecutions. It was promised that we in between the biennial meetings should have an ongoing contact to consider possible interventions.

It was stated a few times that my presence fulfilled the wish of having a European Jewish voice in the audience. BBE will have to decide, whether the outcome of that kind of meetings justifies

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the expenses in time and money.

Bent Melchior. May 1st 2016