

Never Again: MLW Leads Historic Visit to Auschwitz

The Holocaust, Historic Ties, and Unknown History: The Story of Diarna

Excerpts: MWL in the Chicago Tribune

Prized Peace and The Triumph of Tolerance

The Interfaith Imperative: Intersection and Interaction

MAKING HISTORY, MAKING PEACE

The MWL in Europe



*Together, we remember. Together, we
will never forget”*

— The American Jewish Committee, marking the 75th
anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz
on January 27, 2020.

About the MWL

The Muslim World League is a non-governmental international organization based in Makkah. Its goal is to clarify the true message of Islam.

Crown Prince Faisal, the third son of King Abdulaziz Al Saud, founded the Muslim World League during the meeting of the general Islamic Conference on May 18, 1962, in order to fulfill his dream for an Islamic Ummah. The establishment of the MWL continued the vision of the Crown Prince to enlighten and educate the international Muslim community, which began with the founding of the Islamic University of Madinah in 1961. The Muslim World League has grown into a worldwide charity to which the Saudi Royal Family remain active donors.

Ascending to the throne as King Faisal in November 1964, the Saudi leader remained steadfast in his faith, proclaiming: “I beg of you, brothers, to look upon me as both brother and servant. ‘Majesty’ is reserved to God alone and ‘the throne’ is the throne of the Heavens and Earth.”

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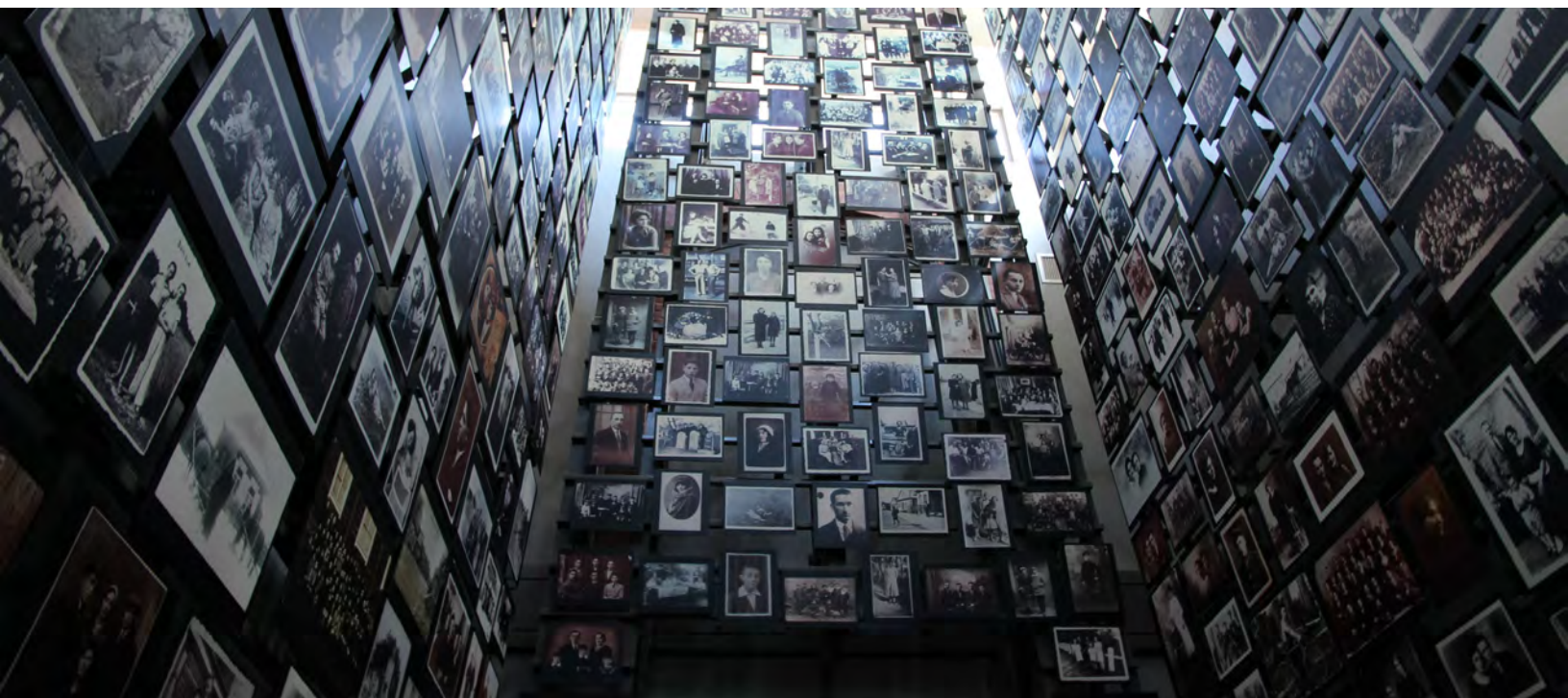
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MWL in December and January

“We should act together to make just peace a reality for all religions, countries, people, civilizations and cultures”

— H.E. Sheikh Dr. Mohammad bin Abdulkarim Al-Issa, addressing the Kabbalat Shabbat, Nozyk Synagogue, Poland, January 24, 2020.



A wall of photos commemorates victims of the Holocaust at the Holocaust Museum in Washington, D.C.

January was a highly active month for the Muslim World League. His Excellency Sheikh Dr. Mohammad bin Abdulkarim Al-Issa met with Muslim scholars to discuss the Charter of Makkah, led a senior delegation to Italy and made an historic trip to Poland, the latter on the occasion of the 75th anniversary of the liberation of the death camps at Auschwitz-Birkenau. At that camp more than 1 million prisoners, a majority of them Jewish, perished

during the genocidal campaign of the holocaust, a barbarity officially denounced by the Secretary-General in January 2019. As with all international engagements by Dr. Al-Issa, his participation in and fight for consistent interfaith dialogue for the purpose of universal tolerance and peace is rooted in a belief in the future that is informed by the lessons of the past.

2019

DECEMBER 9

The Muslim World League honored “**International Day of Commemoration and Dignity of the Victims of the Crime of Genocide and of the Prevention of this Crime,**” sponsored by the **United Nations** since 2015. The December 9 occasion is a global event instituted by that UN to commemorate victims of genocide and highlighting humanity’s responsibility to prevent future genocides. On the occasion, His

This year’s theme focused on the intellectual responsibility of scholars to make sure that religious texts and academic interpretations of those texts are not manipulated for the sake of promoting extremism. “Some do not realize the seriousness of negative perceptions against Islam and therefore they do not interfere in correcting them,” said Dr. Al-Issa of this profound problem of ‘perception’ at the basis of all prejudice.



As an Evangelical and an Israeli citizen, I’m very encouraged that my friend, Saudi Sheikh Mohammed al-Issa – head of the Muslim World League – will visit the Auschwitz Museum in Poland...This is an historic moment of faith diplomacy”

— Author, scholar and interfaith activist Joel C. Rosenberg

Excellency Sheikh Dr. Mohammad bin Abdulkarim Al-Issa, Secretary General of the Muslim World League, reiterated his timeless message: To defeat hate, we must speak and listen to one another, learn from one another and strive for unity.”

DECEMBER 9-12

H.E. Sheikh Dr. Al-Issa was honored at the sixth annual ‘**Forum for the Promotion of Peace Among Muslims**’ in Abu Dhabi.

DECEMBER 20

Under United Nations auspices, today celebrated “**International Human Solidarity Day,**” intended to honor the common core values of all peoples the world over, regardless of nation, ethnicity, race, religion and economic differences. As Dr. Al-Issa stated earlier in 2019 at the Responsible Leaders Summit held at the UN Secretariat in New York: “It is going to take leadership at all levels to change the world. No one of us has all



His Excellency Dr. Al-Issa welcomes Muslim scholars at the Charter of Makkah Conference in January 2020.

Leading Muslim scholars arrive at the Charter of Makkah Conference hosted by the Muslim World League in January 2020.

the solutions, but together we just might.

2020

JANUARY 7

This week, the **Muslim World League Supreme Council** began its annual meeting in **Makkah**. Muslim scholars from around the world attended the conference to discuss the Charter signed last May and other efforts to promote peace, tolerance and cultural harmony, with the Supreme Council itself organized to emphasize “cooperation, coexistence and love among all peoples through observance of Charter principles.” These Council meetings, intended to maintain a diligent observation of the Charter’s implementation



It is a sign that maybe religions are not that different and instead of dividing people, they should unite people."

— Students at the Università Cattolica, Milan, upon the closing of an address given there by H.E. Dr. Al-Issa



Dr. Al-Issa visits with the Catholic University of the Sacred Heart leadership in Milan before giving a lecture for students and faculty on the importance of interreligious dialogue.

Dr. Al-Issa views some of the oldest manuscripts on display at the Ambrosian Library in Milan.

worldwide, are summed up by the MWL's belief that "dialogue is the most effective tool for building respectful & harmonious relationships with others".

JANUARY 15-17

Starting off the week, H.E. Dr. Al-Issa visited the **Università Cattolica** in Milan for a meeting on inter-faith dialogue. Later in the week, the Secretary General visited the historic **Ambrosian Library**, Milan, founded by the great humanist and scholar Cardinal Federico in 1609. The Cardinal dedicated the space to multicultural learning, with an emphasis on dialogue and learning from other cultures and faiths.

JANUARY 23

"History in the making," in the words of the American Jewish Committee (AJC). H.E. Dr. Al-Issa becomes the most senior Islamic figure to date to visit the memorial at **Auschwitz**, which during World War II was the site of what is commonly regarded as the worst industrial genocide campaign history.

A delegation of **62 representatives, including 25 prominent religious leaders, from 28 countries** lead by Dr. Al-Issa, together with the Global Delegation of the **American Jewish Committee** (AJC), visited the site to mark **75 years** since liberation of that German Nazi-led camp, officially commemorated on January 27. Dr. Al-Issa lit a candle at the Wall of Executions in memory of all those killed there, a number estimated in the thousands. The two delegations led prayer services in

Arabic and Hebrew.

JANUARY 24

H.E. Dr. Al-Issa and Muslim dignitaries began the day with a visit to the **Polin Museum of the History of the Jews** in Warsaw. They later visited the **Nożyk Synagogue** in the Polish capital, greeted upon their arrival by Chief Rabbi Michael Schudrich and other Jewish leaders this afternoon to attend **Kabbalat Shabbat** services at the synagogue, the only surviving pre-WWII Jewish place of worship in the Polish capital. In his address there, Dr. Al-Issa stated: "We should act together to make just peace a reality for all religions, countries, people, civilizations, and cultures."

While at Nożyk, Dr. Al-Issa was presented with a gift by the AJC in appreciation of his efforts to promote interfaith solidarity, understanding and harmonious co-existence. To commemorate Al-Issa's forward-looking leadership, AJC **President Harriet Schleifer**



Dr. Al-Issa attends Kabbalat Shabbat Services at the Nożyk Synagogue in Warsaw, sharing a powerful message of interfaith understanding.



We are different, but we love one another. We are different, but we live alongside one another. We are different, but we understand one another. We are different, but we forgive one another.”

— His Excellency Sheikh Dr. Mohammad Al-Issa

presented, during an interfaith program at the Nożyk Synagogue, an artwork with the injunction “to remember” in Hebrew, Arabic, and English.

Later, the two delegations shared a Shabbat meal together. The 100 attendees at the Shabbat dinner, held at the **Royal Palace**, brought together **leading Polish government and parliamentary officials**, including the Speaker of the Senate, Minister of Foreign Affairs, and Secretary of State in the Office of the President of the Republic, as well as **leading Christian clergy**, among them the Primate of Poland, **ambassadors** to Poland from Australia, Canada, and Germany, top representatives of the Polish Jewish community, “and other friends of AJC,” according to the website of that organization.

JANUARY 24

H.E. Dr. Al-Issa and the Grand Mufti of Poland, **Ahmed Tomasz Miśkiewicz**, addressed worshippers and delegates from the American Jewish Committee (AJC) during a visit to **Tatarska St.**

Mosque in Warsaw. Dr. Al-Issa addressed both Muslim and Jewish attendees at the Friday services, stating, as quoted by *Al-Arabiya*: “We’ve come here as a high-level Islamic delegation comprising of senior Muslim scholars from different sects to say these words and through tangible actions – not just through talk nor negative reservation, but through all of our attendance – this is our religion’s stance toward that crime.”

JANUARY 27

Officially, **‘Holocaust Remembrance Day’**, honoring the 75 years since prisoners were liberated from Nazi concentration camp Auschwitz. As the Muslim World League commented on the day: “After 1,689 days & 1 million+ dead, the murder & pain came to an end.”

JANUARY 28

David Harris, CEO of the American Jewish Committee (AJC), and Dr. Al-Issa co-authored and published an op-ed in *The Chicago Tribune*, “Auschwitz Has United Muslims and Jews.” They write: “We come



Dr. Al-Issa and David Harris tour the POLIN Museum of the History of Polish Jews on their visit to Warsaw.

At the POLIN Museum, visitors get a sense of what the streets of Warsaw would have looked like during World War II.

Dr. Al-Issa lights a candle in memory of the victims of the Holocaust at the International Monument at Auschwitz II-Birkenau.

from very different backgrounds.... We have come together, believing that the world desperately needs greater interfaith understanding and cooperation.”



Dr. Al-Issa lights a candle at the Wall of Executions.

‘NEVER AGAIN’

Editorial Staff of the Journal of the Muslim World League



*As Muslim and as Jew, we
remember them. And we
honor their memories by
bearing witness, linking arms
and saying, ‘Never again.’”*

— David Harris, CEO of the American Jewish Committee, and H.E. Sheikh Dr. Mohammad bin Abdulkarim Al-Issa, in a joint op-ed, “How Auschwitz Has United Muslims and Jews,” The Chicago Tribune, January 28, 2020.

The ‘Wall of Execution’ that dominates the melancholy site that is today the Auschwitz Museum is located in the yard on the side of “Block II,” where, during the German Nazi occupation of Poland, the first gassings took place. At the Wall, the condemned were lined up against the notorious wall and shot, one after the other. It was all part of the abhorrently systematic nature of industrial genocide that defined the darkest days of World War II. Several thousand men and women were killed at the Wall—this included Polish political prisoners who were members of resistance movements, Russian prisoners-of-war, and, as is perhaps best known, Jewish prisoners. The Wall was dismantled in 1944 though the larger camp was still in existence. This did not mean the end of summary executions, however, and torture was carried out there as well. It was before this heartbreaking symbol of one of the greatest genocides in human history that H.E. Sheikh Dr. Mohammad bin Abdulkarim Al-Issa took

candle in hand, and lived a moment of eternity within a chapter of history that has never receded to the past. He was part of a joint delegation alongside the American Jewish Committee (AJC). At the Wall, the two delegations led Muslim and Jewish prayers alternately, each group participating in the solemn silence of the other. The event, as the President of the Congress of Christian Leaders noted on social media, was “seismic.” For, the presence of Dr. Al-Issa signified the highest-ranking senior Muslim and Muslim delegation ever to visit the site of these extermination camps.



I can say in the name of all Muslim visitors: We are deeply affected by that which we’ve seen, by this terrible crime, this crime against humanity. It is the great responsibility of the global community to ensure that this never happens again.”

— Dr. Mohammad Alissa, January 23, 2020

The joint mission to Poland is a key element of the Memorandum of Understanding between AJC and MWL, which was signed by Dr. Al-Issa and David Harris, head of the AJC at the latter’s headquarters in New York, on April 30, 2019. As part of this historic interfaith mission the senior leadership of the AJC participated, including **Rabbi David Rosen**, head of the AJC’s Department of Interreligious Affairs, and **AJC President Harriet Schleifer**. Later, **Polish President Andrej Duda** visited the camp with Holocaust survi-

vors accompanying him. “I can say in the name of all Muslim visitors: We are deeply affected by that which we’ve seen, by this terrible crime, this crime against humanity,” Dr. Al-Issa said of the visit. “It is the great responsibility of the global community to ensure that this never happens again.”



“History in the Making”: Dr. Al-Issa begins his visit, accompanied by Muslim leaders from around the world and AJC leadership.

As reported by the *Times of Israel*, the group was shown the gruesome evidence of the horrors the Nazis inflicted on the camps’ prisoners, which included “some 1 million Jews, 75,000 Poles, 21,000 Roma, 14,000 Soviets and around 15,000 others, such as Jehovahs Witness and homosexuals,” according to the Auschwitz Memorial Museum. “The trip culminated in a memorial service between the former gas chambers and crematorium, at which both Jewish and Muslim prayers were offered on behalf of the Holocaust victims,” the *Times* noted.

The Muslim World League, in keeping with its own single-minded mission, sees as its responsibility to turn that moment into a timeless guideline for the future if world peace really has a substantial chance at overcoming endless cycles of societal and nation-



Our presence at Auschwitz was as much about the present as the past”

— David Harris, CEO of the American Jewish Committee, and H.E. Sheikh Dr. Mohammad bin Abdulkarim Al-Issa, in a joint op-ed, “How Auschwitz Has United Muslims and Jews,” Chicago Tribune, January 28, 2020.

al violence. Neither the ‘burdens of history’ nor the anxieties of the future can deter the organization from that purpose, however massive the challenge. This

month’s landmark Muslim-Jewish interfaith testimonial of the Auschwitz camps, and the authentic bonding of hearts, minds and shared historical experience resulting from the visit, underscores this commitment perhaps more strongly than any of the MWL’s achievements to date.

Dr. Robert Satloff of the Washington Institute of Near East Policy, in comparing the visit of Dr. Al-Issa to the Secretary General’s tour of the Holocaust Museum in Washington DC in May 2018 and the MWL’s condemnation of Holocaust denial in January 2018, summed it up best: “In January [2018], he talked the talk on recognizing the calamity and enormity of the Holocaust; today[January 2020] he walked the walk.” It may be said that Dr. Al-Issa has taken that “walk” by several leaps and bounds to a new standard of Muslim-Jewish relations.



In May 2018, Dr. Al-Issa visited the Holocaust Museum in Washington, D.C. with Robert Satloff, Executive Director of the Washington Institute of Near East Policy on Dr. Al-Issa: “Yesterday, he talked the talk; today he walks the walk”

It is in the spirit of this epoch-making interfaith event, and in honor of the 75th anniversary of the liberation of the camps at Auschwitz-Birkenau “1,689 days and 1 million-plus dead later,” to which this issue of *The Journal of the Muslim World League* is dedicated. That said, no matter how positive the inspired mood of a particular historic event —the commemorations, the recognition and honors— the MWL is aware that the fight for interfaith tolerance is a daily calling and a constant behind-the-scenes struggle. The MWL-AJC delegation to Auschwitz is, to date, but the most high-profile expression of the shared values between our organizations. Both our groups recognize that to ensure the viability and generational continuity of interfaith tolerance much work still needs to be done.

Thus, this issue also features a diversity of stories perhaps more mundane than this month’s historic mission to Poland, but no less significant in their collective

contribution to our ultimate goals. These features serve to reinforce the idea that tolerance must be exhibited in every area of life—from religious commonalities, to lesser-known but key political-cultural relationships between the major faiths, to commercial relations; to culture and art. Employing the theme of Muslim-Jewish relations, this issue offers some great stories that highlight examples of outstanding cooperation between the two sides—often in the most “unexpected” ways.

It is our hope you will enjoy this issue; all the significance of the key event it celebrates and the message for the future it communicates. What may take twenty years in the making can, within one moment—one symbol, one Muslim leader, one candle in hand, one monumental human tragedy of mainly Jewish victims—result in what will no doubt become a universal memory to last an eternity. In a word, ‘Never Again.’

Auschwitz I & II – A Brief History

The first inmates, German criminals brought to the camp in May 1940 as functionaries, established the camp’s reputation for violence. “Prisoners were beaten, tortured, and executed for the most trivial reasons,” as *Wikipedia* comments.. The first gassings—of Soviet and Polish prisoners—took place in Block 11 of Auschwitz I in August 1941. Construction of Auschwitz II began the following month, and from 1942 until late 1944 freight trains delivered Jews from all over German-occupied Europe.

Of the 1.3 million people sent to Auschwitz, 1.1 million died. The death toll includes 960,000 Jews (865,000 of whom were gassed on arrival), 74,000 non-Jewish Poles, 21,000 Roma, 15,000 Soviet prisoners of war, and up to 15,000 other Europeans. Those not gassed died of starvation, exhaustion, disease, individual executions, or beatings. Others were killed during medical experiments. The scholar Raul Hillberg analyzed these numbers in his 1961 book, *The Destruction of the European Jews*.

At least 802 prisoners tried to escape, 144 successfully, and on 7 October 1944 two Sonderkommando (Special Command) units, consisting of prisoners who staffed the gas chambers, launched an unsuccessful uprising. “Only 789 staff (about 15 percent) ever stood trial; several, including camp commandant Rudolf Höss, were executed. The Allies’ failure to act on early reports of atrocities in the camp by bombing it or its railways remains controversial.”

As the Soviet Red Army approached Auschwitz in January 1945, toward the end of the war, the Nazi SS (‘Schutzstaffel’—a senior paramilitary organization of the Nazi party) sent most of the camp’s population west on a “death march” to camps inside Germany and Austria. The Russian troops entered the camp on January 27, 1945, a day commemorated since 2005 as International Holocaust Remembrance Day. In 1947 Poland founded the Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum on the site of Auschwitz I and II, and in 1979 it was named a World Heritage Site by UNESCO.



The Muslim World, the Jewish Faith and the Global Community

Editorial Staff of the Journal of the Muslim World League



*As conflicts raged across
the Middle East - from Iraq
to Israel - issues affecting
Muslim and Jewish
communities were ablaze.
But there was MJC. Still
scheduled, still receiving
applications, and still
striving to repair the world
that had become ignited
with hatred"*

— Conference participant Ben Kasten, in an August 30, 2014, article entitled "The 2014 Muslim Jewish Conference: An Ambitious, Daring, Unforgettable Week" for the UK edition of The Huffington Post.

In August 1964, Pope Paul VI, in his encyclical "Ecclesiam Suam," exhorted the Catholic Church to be in constant dialogue with the outside world—with humanity in general, between the Church and the non-Christian religions, with what he called "separated brethren," and within the Church. The Church itself would converse across all these spheres "in the spirit of love and obedience."

That was nearly sixty years ago, and we are still fighting to establish a lasting, respectful and productive dialogue among faiths, within faiths and between faiths and the secular world.

"In the lurid context of mass atrocities, there are no panaceas or elixirs," wrote scholar Peter Admirand of Dublin University in Ireland in a 2016 article "Dialogue in the Face of a Gun? Interfaith Dialogue and Limiting Mass Atrocities." He continued: "Amidst grisly accounts of suffering and torture, senseless pain and inhumanity; and the ascendancy of brutality over love, compassion and dialogue, supposedly all-encompassing solutions falter."

There are many possible reasons for these failures—a strain on domestic resources, volatile political developments, historical resentments and the clash of traditionalism and modernism. Anti-Semitism, Islamophobia and racism certainly are not phenomena of the past, but undeniable present-day realities despite all that civilized society should have learned from history by now.

Against this difficult backdrop, the Muslim Jewish Conference, founded in Vienna in 2010, has had a tangible impact on the future leaders of the Muslim and Jewish communities (MJC) worldwide in the effort to confront historic cycles of vengeance and violence, the prejudices that foster them, and the ignorance that sustains them.



I commend the dedication of all those responsible for the achievements of the Muslim Jewish Conference and wish you Godspeed in all the important work that remains to be done”

— former U.S. President Bill Clinton, in a letter to the MCJ, of June 2013. The former president has sent a letter to the Conference every year since its inception.

“The conference followed intense threats to religious freedom, such as the recent ban on religious slaughter in Denmark as well as the far-right’s shameful resurgence across the European Union. Communities were grieving over murderous attacks at Jewish and Muslim institutions, they were reeling over the synagogues and Islamic cultural centres torched, and they were sickened by the desecration of their religious cemeteries. Social media was again used to launch anonymous attacks and hate speech. As conflicts raged across the Middle East - from Iraq to Israel - issues affecting Muslim and Jewish communities were ablaze. But there was MJC. Still scheduled, still receiving applications,

and still striving to repair the world that had become ignited with hatred.” Approximately 60 Jewish and Muslim students from all over the world gather with the stated common goal of establishing peaceful relations between both religions by way of intense “discussion committees,” guest speakers, open dialogue panels and social events. The results have not been merely those of feel-good talk-shop enlightenment: the participants have been notable leaders in politics, academia and the business



The library at the University of Vienna.

Source: [University of Vienna](#)

world and has earned the praise of no less than the Imam of Al-Azhar in Cairo, the leading scholarly Islamic authority in the world.

"In contrast to imposing simple skills for intercultural communication, the MJC patiently contributes to long-term change and mutual appreciation by cultivating a new way of thinking about each other," remarked former President Bill Clinton, a long-time advisor to the organization. One of the main attractions of the Conference has been its decade-long duration, which lends its mission the credibility to sustain Muslim-Jewish partnership beyond academic elites.

Adding to this credibility is the fact that the MJC boasts a prestigious board of directors, including Rabbi David Rosen, who participated in the historic MWL-AJC visit to Auschwitz this month, and who is Knight Commander of the Order of Gregory the Great in recognition of his contribution to Jewish-Catholic reconciliation; Dr. Mustafa Cerich, the Grand Mufti of Bosnia-Herzegovina, the co recipient of the UNESCO Peace Prize and the recipient of the International Council of Christians and Jews Annual Sternberg Award and is on the advisory council of the Tony Blair Faith Foundation; Andrey Azoulay, Counselor to His Majesty the King of Morocco and President of the Executive Committee of the Foundation for the Three Cultures and the Three Religions, based in Seville; Sally Painter, a Senior Advisor in the Clin-



Interfaith dialogue is not just a model of negotiation. It is a practice of mutual empowerment for people of all faiths involved"

— The United States Embassy in Germany, commenting on the MJC Conference, 2015, Berlin

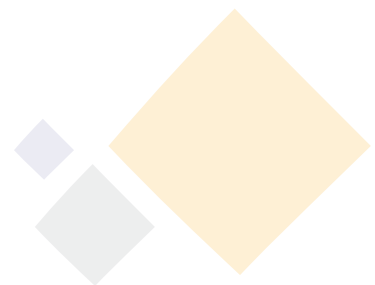


I have the utmost respect for the Muslim participants and young leaders who are sometimes risking everything, and go back and effect change in the areas where they can,"

— MJC co-founder Ilja Sichrovsky, whose father is Jewish.

ton administration, and Ambassador Jacob Finci, a founder of the Central European humanitarian organization La Benevolencija. Dr. Frank-Walter Steinmeier, President of Germany, and participant in the Auschwitz commemoration with the MWL and AJC this month, has been a long-time advisor.

"I have the utmost respect for the Muslim participants and young leaders who are sometimes risking everything, and go back and effect change in the areas where they can," commented MJC co-founder Ilja Sichrovsky, whose father is Jewish. He was quoted in the online newspaper The JC in an August 2015 article, "Muslims Risking Lives to Meet Jews at Annual Muslim Jewish Conference" about the Conference then being held in Berlin that year. "They go home and talk about the Holocaust and antisemitism. They may turn out to be diplomats, artists, community activists," he wrote.





Dr. Al-Issa meets with Jewish and Muslim leaders in Copenhagen.

The Holocaust, Historic Ties and Unknown History: The Diarna

Editorial Staff of the Journal of the Muslim World League



*All cultures and societies have sacred sites and these
sacred sites are related to concepts of who we are,
where we came from and where we are going.”*

—Richard Leventhal, Director of the Cultural Heritage Center at the University of Pennsylvania
Museum of Archaeology.

NOTABLE VIRTUAL EXHIBITS BY THE DIARNA FOUNDATION

2019:

“Exploring Jewish Sites in Urmia,
Iran”

2018:

“Jewish Treasures of Southern Mo-
rocco”

2018:

“A Virtual Pilgrimage to Morocco’s
Jewish Saints”

2018:

“The Synagogues of Cairo and Alex-
andria, Egypt”

2017:

“The Jews of Algeria”

2016:

“Yom Hashoah: World War II Sites in
the Middle East and North Africa”



A shrine at the Ourzazate Commentary is featured as a part of Diarna's exhibit on Jewish Treasures of Southern Morocco.

Recent years have seen greatly increased attempts to manipulate holocaust history and memory. For several decades much attention has been paid to Holocaust denial, what Jewish scholars call “the assault on Holocaust memory.” That is why when Dr. Mohammad Al-Issa formally denounced Holocaust denial in January 2018 and then visited the Holocaust Museum in Washington the following May, the MWL took an important step forward in Muslim-Jewish relations and unequivocally rejected anti-Semitism among Muslims and non-Muslims alike. The interfaith delegation of the MWL and the American Jewish Committee (AJC) this month represents the spiritual apotheosis of such excellent progress.

Muslims and Jews relations share a “hidden” history of aid, assistance and compassion during the Holocaust as seen in the example of Muslims who offered such help to their threatened Jewish neighbors. One organization, Diarna, has committed to educate the public on the history of Muslim-Jewish cooperation and engagement in anti-Nazi resistance during World War II. In 2008, New York-based activist, author and

scholar Jason Guberman began a project to map and collect photographs of synagogues, Jewish shrines and cemeteries throughout the Middle East to create for posterity “a digital museum of the physical remnants of these ancient, and almost entirely defunct, communities.” Diarna (www.diarna.org), whose name means “our home” in Judeo-Arabic, was the result.

The organization has been able to take advantage of the recent upheavals in the region to expand its reach “even as Islamic State and other groups have been destroying what little remains.”

This group has been expanding the limits in the study of Jewish heritage and has brought to light the complexity and closeness of the Muslim and Jewish relationship in episodic contexts during that brutal period. It has done this through virtual tours of Jewish history, art and architecture in Muslim lands, but with a primary emphasis on Holocaust period. Diarna has documented how Muslims engaged with Jews and helped them seek refuge from persecution by careful research and preservation of forgotten Jewish culture across the Middle East and northern Africa. In one example, the organization’s website

states: “The Geo-Museum of North African and Middle Eastern Jewish Life [a subset organization] is working to digitally preserve the physical remnants of Jewish history throughout the region. We are in a race against time to capture site data and record place-based oral histories before even the memories of these communities are lost.” Diarna was among the pioneers in the synthesis of digital mapping technology, traditional scholarship and field research, resulting in a treasure trove of multimedia documentation. All of this combines to lend a virtual presence “and guarantee untrammelled access to Jewish historical sites lest they be forgotten or erased.”

The Holocaust was primarily, but not exclusively, a European event. During World War II, labor and internment camps were built in North Africa, and Jews were deported out of major cities and even transported to Europe, where many eventually met their death at the hands of the Nazis. Diarna maps show some of the different Holocaust sites.

In another example: During the Holocaust, France’s Vichy regime established a series of forced labor and “discipline” camps in the region’s far eastern flank where hundreds of Jewish and non-Jewish political prisoners toiled and died in the desert. These sites are similarly lost to public memory, but thanks to Diarna’s dedication to investigating this history, the Vichy episode has re-emerged as an important reminder of North Africa’s Holocaust history, and in recent years begun to attract scholarly interest.

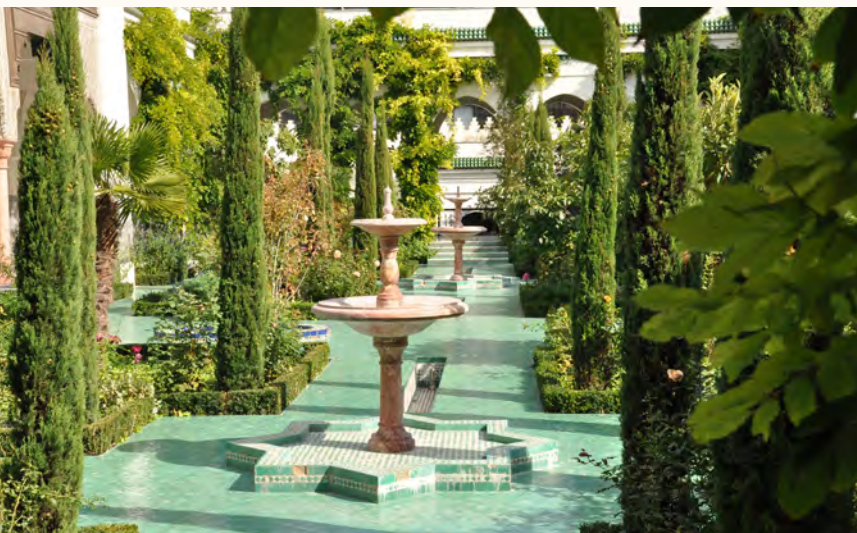
The influence of the organization’s work has been rather impressive: For example, today in Morocco, there is a Holocaust curriculum where up until 2011 there had been no mention of the Holocaust in Moroccan schools. In a further effort to educate others on the relationship between the two communities, Diarna recently organized the exhibit, “The Common Ground Between Us: Jewish and Muslim Communities in Morocco, Egypt and Iraqi-Kurdistan,” designed for the public “to get an artistic look into the relationship between Jewish and Muslim communities” and the influence Muslims had on Jewish survival and protection.



“From Casablanca to New York: A Celebration of Moroccan-Jewish Partnership” was organized by the Diarna Foundation in January 2017.

Source: Diarna Foundation

THE GREAT MOSQUE OF PARIS AND THE RESCUE OF JEWS DURING THE GERMAN OCCUPATION OF PARIS



Gardens of the Great Mosque of Paris

Source: Marc Cooper

Though explored in the September 2019 issue of the *Journal*, it is a story that will always bear repeating: that of the beautiful Grand Mosque of Paris playing the role of savior of Jewish individuals during the German occupation of France.

If this seems like the stuff of movies, that is exactly what it became. Just over four years ago, the French film *Les Hommes Libres* (Free Men) told the story of how the founder and leader of the mosque, Si Kaddour Benghabrit, the head of the Grand Mosque, provided refuge and certificates of Muslim identity to a small number of Jews to allow them to evade arrest and deportation.

A review of the film in *The New York Times* recounted that France was home to a large population of North Africans in the early 1940s, including thousands of Sephardic Jews. The Jews spoke Arabic and shared many of the same traditions

and everyday habits as the Arabs, and Muslim and Jewish names were often similar. The mosque, a tiled, walled fortress-like structure the size of a city block on the Left Bank, was an oasis of calm where visitors were fed and clothed and could bathe, and where they could talk freely and rest in the garden. It was also a place of refuge and rescue. In his 2006 book, *Among the Righteous*, Robert Satloff, director of the Washington Institute for Near East Policy, uncovered stories of Arabs who saved Jews during the Holocaust, and included a chapter on the Grand Mosque.

Dalil Boubakeur, the current rector, confirmed to him that some Jews — up to 100 perhaps — were given Muslim identity papers by the mosque. Mr. Boubakeur said individual Muslims brought Jews they knew to the mosque for help, and the chief imam, not Benghabrit, was the man directly responsible for helping them.

In one uncorroborated account, Albert Assouline, a North African Jewish man who escaped from a German prison camp, describes how more than 1,700 resistance fighters — including Jews but also a lesser number of Muslims and Christians — found refuge in the mosque's underground caverns, and that the rector provided many Jews with certificates of Muslim identity.

The *Bâtisseuses de Paix* ("Women Builders of Peace") an association of Jewish and Muslim women working for inter-community harmony, submitted a petition in 2005 to Yad Vashem Council (the international Holocaust memorial foundation) to recognize that the Mosque of Paris saved many Jews between 1942 and 1944, and that Yad Vashem should thus recognize Si Kaddour Benghabrit as one of the so-called "Righteous Among the Nations," an honor awarded by the State of Israel to non-Jews for acts of great humanitarian charity to Jews. At this time, the request remains unfulfilled, as there is difficulty identifying survivors given that the mosque had worked with false passports. For his contributions, M. Benghabrit was awarded the Grand Cross of the Legion d'Honneur. He is buried in a reserved area to the north of the Mosque of Paris.



Acre and Triumph of Coexistence

“No religion calls for hate. It is people who call for hatred.”

—Imam Sheikh Samir Assi, Imam of the El-Jazzar mosque in Acre, to The Jerusalem Post, November 22, 2018



The port of the old city Acre and El Bachar Mosque.

The historic city of Acre (also known as Akko) is part of the West Galilee municipality in Israel and is famous for Crusader-Muslim showdowns and Napoleon's failed attempt to take its port from the Ottoman Turks. In 2001, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), also fell captive to the charms of the city and named Acre's Old City a World Heritage



All cultures and societies have sacred sites and these sacred sites are related to concepts of who we are, where we came from and where we are going."

—Richard Leventhal, Director of the Cultural Heritage Center at the University of Pennsylvania Museum of Archaeology.

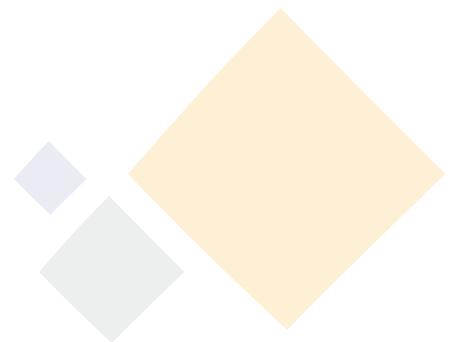
Site. To many Israelis, Acre is an apt symbol of the country's tumultuous development. It is a city that has been shaped by the Romans, Ottomans, Crusaders, Mamelukes, Byzantines and British, and, fittingly, is today home to a population of Jews, Christians and Muslims who coexist brilliantly. The aura of ancient history persists as the Old City is home to one of the oldest ports in the world. A proudly mixed city, Acre's Jewish residents make up about 70% of the population of 50,000, and Arab Muslim residents most of the remaining 30%.

Though its loveliness might lie in its historic quarters and Crusader fortresses, its modern allure is the town's atmosphere of tolerance between Jews and Muslims, a local sentiment that starts at a young age. Teens from both groups express

their views candidly to the Israeli media when asked about their coexistence, insisting that their religious and political views do not get in the way of friendships and partnerships. "The key to their harmonious coexistence seems to be focusing on working on creative projects rather than on 'The Situation,' as they call it," in the words of a 2018 Jerusalem Post article on Acre.

All accepted that at age eighteen military service would be mandatory, although several Arab youths, both male and female, said they would "probably do some kind of civilian national service instead." Meanwhile, long-time Mayor Shimon Lankri, Chief Rabbi of Acre Yosef Yashar and Imam Sheikh Samir Assi of the El-Jazzar mosque have repeatedly made public statements stressing the importance of mutual respect and dialogue. Rabbi Lankri told Israeli media that he objected to the so-called "Muezzin Law," a failed piece of legislation that would have imposed punishment for any broadcast by a muezzin over a public address system, saying there was no need for legislation and he saw no problem with the sound of the Muslim call to prayer.

In addition, creative entrepreneurs are realizing how this mixed Jewish-Arab city offers a model of coexistence. As one Israeli real estate developer, Meir Davidson, remarked in another Jerusalem Post article on the city: "The encounter people have with Arabs via the media is violent and difficult, but whoever can be open, and see that they are good people and great neighbors and people with good hearts, will come here and try." He is among the few Jews who live in the Old City, where most of the residents are Muslim Arabs. "Working with the community is very important to us--Jews, Muslims, everyone," he said.





A member of the interfaith delegation reflects on the visit at the International Monument at Auschwitz.

A Joint Venture in the Making of History: Behind the Scenes of the Historic MWL and AJC Trip to Auschwitz



For the dead and the living, we must bear witness,”

— Elie Weisel, Holocaust survivor, Nobel laureate

Dr. Al-Issa led the delegates hand-in-hand with AJC Director David Harris as they approached the foreboding sign that greets the visitor: —“Work Makes You Free,”—at the entrance of the memo-

rial site at Auschwitz. Harris, at 70 years old, is a longtime advocate for Jewish communities and the son of Holocaust survivors. When Dr. Al-Issa and Mr. Harris arrived together, Deutsche Welle described the scene as “nothing short of remarkable.”

First, the group spent more than a half hour in an exhibit titled “Proof of the Crimes,” and then the delegation walked through the grounds of Birkenau. Ari Gordon, responsible for Jewish-Muslim dialogue at the AJC gave the opening remarks. Like most with the U.S. delegation, he is a descendant of Holocaust survivors. “Switching



Dr. Al-Issa leads the interfaith delegation at Auschwitz.

Dr. Al-Issa and the AJC's David Harris address delegates in a speech, calling the Holocaust a crime against humanity.
Source: AJC

Dr. Al-Issa and delegates listen to reflections on the historical visit to Auschwitz.



To be here among the children of Holocaust survivors and members of the Jewish and Islamic communities is both a sacred duty and a profound honor.”

— Dr. Mohammad Al-Issa

between English, Hebrew and Arabic,” the German broadcaster noted on the occasion, “Gordon read quotes from both the Torah and the Koran, speaking of suffering and hope, while two delegates remembered relatives.”

The nearly two dozen Muslim representatives hailed from Indonesia and the U.S., the Balkans, Scandinavia and the Arab world. In the icy gray of a late winter Central European day, participants lit candles and placed them at the base of the memorial site before leading one another in prayers. Rabbi David Rosen recited Psalm 23 and said the Kaddish, a sanctification of God’s name. Spontaneously, various attendants laid prayer mats on the cold ground of the memorial for Muslim attendees, who oriented themselves towards Makkah and fell to their knees in somber prayer. The melancholic dignity of the afternoon was detailed at length by Deutsche Welle in a January 24 article whose title summed up the spirit of the occasion: “Muslim and Jewish Leaders Stand Together in Solidarity at Auschwitz.”

According to the director of the memorial site, Piotr Cywiński, more than 2.3 million people visited in 2019, with “only a handful of people from Arab world.” Last year, the museum’s ticket reservation system registered some 3,200 guests from Arab-majority countries (though visitors’ religious affiliations are not recorded). Cywinski said the site also receives Muslims among groups of French, Norwegian, German and other visitors.

He is “certain that for all of them, coming to an authentically preserved site of a former camp is an important personal and universal experience.”

About two years prior to this visit, Dr. Al-Issa sent a letter to the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington, in which he expressed “great sympathy with the victims of the Holocaust, an incident that shook humanity to the core.” He underlined that “true Islam is against these crimes” and that “we consider any denial of the Holocaust or minimizing of its effect a crime to distort history and an insult to the dignity of those innocent souls who have perished.” It was upon this visit to the museum in May 2018 that Dr. Al-Issa was moved to write an op-ed about the experience for *The Washington Post*: “I saw for myself the mountains of evidence — the videos, the photos, the placards, the interviews, the memorabilia — that testify to the historic truth of the Holocaust. One doesn’t have to go to the museum to recognize the enormity of the Holocaust — but no one who does come to the museum can deny it,” the Secretary-General wrote. The process then began to snowball. The presi-



*On Jan. 23, we stood together
in the face of history’s
greatest horror, the Holocaust,
at the Auschwitz-Birkenau
death camp where more than
1 million Jews perished. Never
again. Not for any of God’s
children.”*

— David Harris, CEO of the American Jewish Committee, and H.E. Sheikh Dr. Mohammad bin Abdulkarim Al-Issa, in a joint op-ed, “How Auschwitz Has United Muslims and Jews.”
Chicago Tribune, January 28, 2020

dent of the Foundation for Ethnic Understanding, Rabbi Marc Schneier, penned an opinion piece in *The Jerusalem Post* supporting Dr. Al-Issa, stating that there exists “a false narrative out there that Muslims are inveterately hostile to Jews.” Rabbi Schneier, who has worked to foster Judeo-Muslim dialogue and understanding, continued to say that “Muslims are speaking out — and acting out — every day in defense of Jews who are under attack.”

The joint mission to Poland became a key element of the Memorandum of Understanding between AJC and MWL, which was signed by Dr. Al-Issa and David Harris, head of the AJC at the latter’s headquarters in New York, on April 30,



Dr. Al-Issa gives remarks at Kabbalat Shabbat Services at the Nożyk Synagogue in Warsaw.



Dr. Al-Issa signs the visitors book at the POLIN Museum.

“*Delegates stayed a full two hours longer than originally planned, before continuing their long journey together to the Polish capital where mutual visits to a mosque and synagogue were planned...*”

— Deutsche Welle, “Muslim and Jewish Leaders Stand Together in Solidarity at Auschwitz,” January 24, 2020

2019. “Our twenty-first century challenge at AJC is to write a new chapter between the Muslim and Jewish peoples,” said Harris at the Auschwitz Memorial. “There are those who want to keep us divided. We will not let them win. It’s about nothing less than defining the future of the world in which we want to live.”

In the resulting triumph of this dramatic interfaith effort, AJC President Harriet Schleifer presented Dr. Al-Issa, an artwork with the injunction “to remember” in Hebrew, Arabic and English during an interfaith program at the Nozyk Synagogue. “We pray that your visit to Auschwitz will be a clarion call to action for Muslims and all humanity to learn the hard lessons of history — that hatred and demonization of a people nearly led to their total destruction,” said Ms. Schleifer. “We must never allow it to happen again to anyone.”

Aiman Mazyek, the chairman of the Central Council of Muslims in Germany, who has made

numerous trips to the Auschwitz memorial site with groups of young Muslims and Jews, welcomed Dr. Al-Issa's move, saying the visit carries both political as well as religious significance. The influential Mazyek further believes that "it could also have a lasting impact on the societies of many Muslim countries" and that "going to Auschwitz is, not only for Jews and Christians, always also a search for God."

As Deutsche Welle reported, he is adamant that the lesson of Auschwitz is that something like this "must never again" be allowed to happen — a lesson that "we Muslims" must internalize as well. Then, in a profound move that confirmed the historic importance of the visit, German Chancellor Angela Merkel, for the first time during her 14-year tenure as chancellor, paid a visit to the Auschwitz-Birkenau Memorial. She was accompanied by Polish Prime Minister Mateusz Morawiecki and museum director Mr. Cywinski as well as leaders of Jewish organizations.



*We knew what was coming.
But we still weren't prepared
for it."*

— Jewish representative with the MWL-AJC delegation to Auschwitz, as quoted by Deutsche Welle, January 24, 2020



A member of the delegation gives remarks at Kabbalat Shabbat Services at the Nożyk Synagogue in Warsaw.

OP-ED EXCERPTS: "HOW AUSCHWITZ HAS UNITED MUSLIMS AND JEWS,"

David Harris and Mohammad Al-Issa,
Chicago Tribune, January 28, 2020.



One of us is a Muslim, born and raised in Saudi Arabia, a country where Islam is the official religion and the vast majority of the population shares the same faith. There is no local Jewish community and no direct connection to World War II. The other is a Jew, born and raised in a secular United States, exposed to few Muslims during his formative years. His life was shaped by the events of World War II and the experiences of his parents, both Holocaust survivors. Yet on Jan. 23, we stood together with united resolve in the face of history's greatest horror, the Holocaust, at the Auschwitz-Birkenau death camp where more than 1 million Jews perished. Never again. Not for Jews. Not for Muslims. Not for any of God's children."



We have come together, believing that the world desperately needs greater interfaith understanding and cooperation. The terrible attacks on Jews in Pittsburgh, San Diego, Jersey City, New Jersey, Monsey, New York, and Halle, Germany; the genocide against the Rohingya Muslims in Myanmar and the massacre of Muslim worshippers in Christchurch, New Zealand; and the wanton killing of Christians celebrating Easter in Sri Lanka demonstrate the global threat we are all facing."



Within our own communities, we both have been confronting fear, distrust and ignorance of the other. When we met last April, we recognized the interconnectedness of our missions. Our organizations, the Muslim World League and American Jewish Committee, signed an agreement to “make the 21st century an era of harmony and friendship” that unites our communities against all attempts to divide us by race, faith, nationality or ethnicity.

Words are important, but insufficient. The ultimate test is action.”



That explains why we co-headed a joint Jewish-Muslim delegation to Auschwitz to mark the 75th anniversary of the Nazi German camp’s liberation. At a site of unconscionable pain, the images of Jews and Muslims praying in their own manner and to the same God should give the world hope that adherents of both faiths are determined to build a more humane and harmonious tomorrow.”



In Hebrew, we speak of “tikkun olam.” In Arabic, “islah.” Each demands of us to repair the world through education and action, among our own communities and through partnerships such as ours.”



Our presence at Auschwitz was as much about the present as the past.”



The Holocaust reminds us of the human capacity for inhumanity, depravity and bestiality. Two-thirds of European Jewry was destroyed. But the Nazis directed their supremacist ideology at Slavs, Roma, people of color, the handicapped and many others.”



Seventy-five years later, it would be naive of us to believe we are immune to the possibility of another industrialized genocide fueled by ideological extremism. Left unchecked, the forces of evil could threaten any minority community, anywhere...”



As the last remaining survivors and liberators pass on, we have a shared stake in ensuring the lessons of Auschwitz do not disappear with them. To forget would be to invite a new Auschwitz. We must not forget. We dare not forget...”



Together, we saw the shoes, suitcases, eyeglasses, prostheses, hair and shaving brushes, pots and pans, and other belongings of those deported to this accursed place, led to believe it was for relocation, not annihilation. The stark barracks with bare, three-tiered bunk beds, once overflowing with skeletal, lice-infested, terrorized women, men and children. The remnants of the gas chambers and crematoria. The execution walls and hanging sites. The train tracks that brought people packed in suffocating cattle cars. And where Nazi doctors performed medical experiments that are an eternal abomination of science.

These 1.1 million people murdered in Auschwitz were human beings, each with his or her own story, their world brutally cut short.”



As Muslim and as Jew, we remember them. And we honor their memories by bearing witness, linking arms and saying, “Never again.”



We come from very different backgrounds.”



Before touring the POLIN Museum of the History of the Jews, Dr. Al-Issa is greeted by museum leadership.

THE POLIN MUSEUM OF THE HISTORY OF POLISH JEWS

The POLIN Museum of the History of Polish Jews occupies a site in the former Warsaw Ghetto. As the website of that museum explains, “the Hebrew word Polin in the museum’s English name means either, “Poland,” or “rest here” and relates to a legend about the arrival of the first Jews to Poland.”

The museum’s cornerstone was laid in 2007, and the museum opened in 2013. The main exhibition opened in October 2014 and features a multimedia exhibition about the Jewish community that flourished in Poland for a thousand years up to the World War II Holocaust. The building, a postmodern structure in glass, copper, and concrete, was designed by Finnish architects Rainer Mahlamäki and Ilmari Lahdelma



The POLIN museum documents the lives of Polish Jews before the Holocaust.

EUROPE'S UNSUNG MUSLIM HEROES: HONORING THE MUSLIM SOLDIERS OF WORLD WAR I



The biggest surprise was how much respect and loyalty there was between all these people of all faiths in the most gruesome circumstances, the trenches of the World War I."

— Luc Ferrier, Founder of the Forgotten Heroes 14-19, dedicated to raising awareness of the role of Muslim soldiers on the Allied side in World War I



The Menin Gate in Ypres, Belgium

Source: Johan Baker

There is a giant gate, the Menin Gate in the Belgian town of Ypres, that is said "to echo with the mournful tune of the 'Last Post' played by buglers from the local fire brigade." On the walls of the gate, unveiled in 1927, are the names of 54,607 soldiers who were killed in Belgium and have no known grave. Among these are 412 soldiers from India, including Muslims such as Bahadur Khan

of the 57th Wilde's Rifles, who fell during the First Battle of Ypres on October 28, 1914, and Nur Alam of the 40th Pathans, killed on April 26, 1915, during the Second Battle of Ypres.

The little-known role played by these soldiers and their 2.5 million fellow Muslims who fought for Britain, France and Russia in a war not of their making remains a gaping hole in the recorded history of the war. Luc Ferrier, the Belgian founder and chairman of the Forgotten Heroes 14-19 Foundation, has plans to address this ignorance. He is certain the Allies would have lost the war without Muslim soldiers and has maintained that "raising public awareness of their contribution could help counter growing anti-Islamic sentiment in Europe" and give immigrant communities a stronger sense of belonging.

Originally, the aim of his foundation was to discover how Muslims from the former colonies served alongside the Allied forces. "The biggest surprise was how much respect and loyalty there was between all these people of all faiths in the most gruesome circumstances, the trenches of World War I," he has stated in interviews. Among the personal diaries, his group found numerous "heart-warming accounts" of Muslim, Christian and Jewish soldiers fighting side-by-side, sharing their experiences and accommodating each other's culture, music, food and religious practices, despite the difficult conditions in the trenches.



This mosque in Bohoniki, Poland is a typical Lipka mosque.

Source: Lilly M

THE TATARSKA MOSQUE OF WARSAW AND THE UNUSUAL TATAR-MUSLIM HISTORY OF POLAND

When Dr. Al-Issa delivered his Friday sermon at the Tatarska Street Mosque on January 24 before the MWL and AJC delegations in honor of the 75th anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz, he may not have known that he was stepping into a three-hundred year-old tradition in this very Catholic nation.

The mosque is one of the oldest in Poland, named after the first Tatars who arrived in Poland en masse over 300 years ago, settled by the legendary King John III Sobieski and descended from those Tatars who had emigrated from Russia through the Baltics. These were the Polish-Lithuanian Tatars--the "Lipka Tatars" of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania. Today's Polish Muslims, descended from these Tatars, remain a small, closely knit group of around 10,000 who have strongly guard-

ed their culture and fostered in their community the climate of "the Polish Orient."

But assimilation comes naturally. Central and Eastern European Muslim mosques architecturally tend to look very similar to the local Orthodox churches, and the roles Muslims have played in Polish society have provided rich intellectual resources to the national defense of royal Poland. Thanks to linguistic, religious and traditional bonds with the Turkish people, the Polish Muslims provided invaluable services to their new homeland as envoys, as writers and translators, and through the Tatars, the Poles obtained information about the politics of the East. Today, many a Pole claims, and with pride, to have "a Tatar ancestor in one's family and blood."

HISTORIC POLAND AND ITS MUSLIMS: A brief overview, with excerpts from “mysalaam.com” on Polish-Tatar culture



*To acknowledge their brave and loyal contribution,
a statue of a mounted Tatar soldier was unveiled
at Orunia Park in Gdansk in 2010...”*

— mysalaam.com. on Polish-Muslims (Polish-Tatar) history and culture.

MUSLIMS HAVE BEEN IN POLAND FOR SEVEN CENTURIES

Muslim Tatars first came to Poland from the Crimea in the 14th century, when they were invited to help the Polish-Lithuanian alliance fight the Christian Knights of the Teutonic Order. They famously joined the alliance at the Battle of Grunwald in 1410 and helped save both nations. As a reward, they were invited to stay and were given land around the borderlands of Poland, Lithuania and Belarus, where many families have resided ever since, making them one of Europe’s oldest Muslim communities.

POLAND IS HOME TO EUROPE’S MOST INDIGENOUS MOSQUES

The historic mosques of Poland are found in two towns close to the northeastern border. The 18th-century Bohoniki Mosque and the 19th-century Kruszyniany mosque are often mistaken for local churches. The only clues that these are Muslim places of worship are the crescents on the top.

MUSLIMS HAVE FOUGHT FOR POLAND FOR OVER 600 YEARS

“Ever since the 1410 Battle of Grunwald, Polish Muslims have fought in every major war for Poland. This included opposing the Ottomans at the 1683 Battle of Vienna under Polish King John III Sobieski, the Napoleonic Wars and the Second World War, in which a Polish Tatar Regiment fought against the German Nazis. To acknowledge their brave and loyal contribution, a statue of a mounted Tatar soldier was unveiled at Orunia Park in Gdansk in 2010.”

POLAND’S MILITARY HAD IMAMS

Polish-Muslim soldiers were so highly regarded that the Polish Army installed its very own imams at the start of the 20th century. The imams took Islamised oaths from new Muslim recruits and led soldiers in daily prayers. The last of these Imams, Ali Ismail Woronowicz, was posthumously awarded the Knight’s Cross of the Order of Polonia Restituta in 2011 after being killed by the Soviet Union in 1941.



Dr. Al-Issa was honored in Abu Dhabi, December 9, 2019.

Source: Al Khaleej Today

Prized Peace and The Triumph of Tolerance:



Texts should be well understood in order to understand their truth and people should not select one paragraph and interpret it as they like. Ideas in religious texts are often explained in other texts.”

— Dr. Mohammad Al-Issa, upon receiving the “Peace in Muslim Societies Award” in the UAE, December 9, 2019, Berlin

In late December at the Sixth Annual Forum for Promoting Peace in Muslim Societies, the UAE's Minister of Tolerance, Sheikh Nahyan bin Mubarak Al-Nahyan, presented the Peace in Muslim Societies Award to Dr. Al-Issa in recognition of the Secretary-General's outstanding efforts in promoting the highest values of intellectual integrity and consistent interfaith dialogue around the world. Dr. Al-Issa praised the organizers' decision to focus on the role of religions in promoting tolerance, "thus sending religious leaderships around the world an important message to assume their responsibilities and promote values and ethics," as Arab News reported. Furthermore, Dr. Al-Issa took the occasion to shed light on the issue of misunderstanding religious texts—a matter often overlooked or deliberately ignored in many discussions—and made a rather pointed statement warning against the all-too-easy "cherry picking" of texts among dishonest scholars to justify their own views. December's event was the fourth consecutive year that the MWL Secretary-General has attended the event.

"Texts should be well understood in order to understand their truth, and people should not select one paragraph and interpret it as they like. Ideas in religious texts are often explained in other texts," said Dr. Al-Issa. He also said that honest discussion depends upon honest intellectual values, which underscores the critical role of scholars for promoting peace and tolerance.

The Forum for Promoting Peace in Muslim Societies, held December 9-11, included 45 faith leaders and advocates of tolerance, and is under the patronage of Sheikh Abdullah bin Zayed Al Nahyan, Minister of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation. This year's theme was "The Role of Religions in Promoting Tolerance: From Possibility to Necessity." Several representatives of the United Nations, decision-makers and influential figures from international civil society organizations and non-profits were also in attendance. The conference issued a charter titled "The New Alliance of Virtue," which was officially described "a platform for exchanging ideas, highlighting common values and reinforcing human fraternity."

The forum is in furtherance of a UAE strategy to promote peace and tolerance, and Sheikh Abdullah noted that the Marrakesh Declaration of 2016 called for "the establishment of a legal document defending the rights of religious minorities in the Islamic world." He said, "The Marrakesh Declaration of 2016 is based on the objectives of the Medinah Document that was established as the original model of citizenship as called for by Islamic doctrine, which respects the rights of minorities."



It is very positive that scholars from different religions are attending the forum, as they are the most responsible for instilling peace and tolerance."

— Dr. Mohammad Al-Issa, upon accepting the "Peace in Muslim Societies Award" in the UAE, December 9, 2019

According to the Forum's organizer, the New Alliance of Virtue initiative draws direct inspiration from the earliest traditions of Islam. The original "Alliance of Virtue" (*hif al-fudul*) was established in the early 7th century at Makkah, in the house of Abdullah ibn Judan. Its purpose was to defend the weak and the innocent against the rapaciousness of those more powerful.

The Prophet Mohammad (Peace Be Upon Him) and the first of the "Rightly Guided Caliphs," Abu Bakr, were both present when the Alliance



We need thinkers and leaders to become healers and doctors of modern society by replacing the jurisprudence of hate with the jurisprudence of peace. We need to set and be examples of the truth and uphold the integrity of Muslims and Islam across the world.”

— Sheikh Nahyan bin Mubarak Al-Nahyan, 6th annual Forum for Promoting Peace in Muslim Societies, December 9-11, 2019

was formed, though it was before Mohammad’s prophethood. He later praised it, saying: “I was present in the house of Ibn Judan when an alliance was formed, and were I to have been called upon by it in Islam, I would have answered its call...”

Last February in Washington, H.E. Sheikh Abdullah bin Bayyah, then President of the Forum for Promoting Peace, led a panel of more than 200 individuals from the three Abrahamic faiths and others, comprising religious leaders and senior politicians in creating this modern version of the “Alliance of Virtue” among religions. The Charter, according to the Forum, “follows the model of the original, on a global scale. It brings together those of good-will for the benefit of humanity, an effort across religions to enable its members to live side-by-side in peace and happiness.” Its aim is not to bridge theological differences. Members will instead cooperate based on a common theology of God-given human dignity, seeking virtue for the benefit of all.

Sheikh Abdullallah emphasized that “reaching an intellectual change of perspective that considers tolerance a mere possibility among possibilities under the framework of religion”

was the central point to be stressed. The forum assembly followed the decision by the UAE to declare 2019 as the Year of Tolerance, “with the aim of spreading a culture of tolerance among the nations of the world.”

In his speech, Dr. Al-Issa summed up the spirit of the forum, stating: “The importance of scholarship in spreading the message of genuine Islamic and humanitarian values related to peace and tolerance cannot be overstated. This is our mission.”



The Sixth Assembly of the Forum on Promoting Peace met in Abu Dhabi on December 9, 2019



Alhambra, the great fortress of Granada, was ruled by the Muslim Emir of Granada in the high Middle Ages.

Source: Jebulon

The Interfaith Imperative: Intersection, Interaction and the Unusual Case of Spain.



Maimonides, the influential medieval Sephardic-Jewish scholar and philosopher, was influenced by great Muslim thinkers in southern Spain.

Source: Rambam Institute

History is so rich with examples of intellectual cross-fertilization among faiths, cultures and civilizations, particularly Muslims, Christians and Jews. Jewish scholars such as Maimonides, one of the most famous philosophers of the Middle Ages, discussed the relationship between Islam and Jewish law, and Maimonides himself, it has been said, was influenced by Islamic legal thought. In another example, one of the most important early Jewish philosophers influenced by Islamic philosophy was Rav Saadia Gaon (892–942), and the first Islamic Waqf (a charitable endowment for Muslim religious purposes) was donated by a Jew, Rabbi Mukhayriq.

After 912, during the reign of Abd-ar-Rahman III and his son, Al-Hakam II, the Jews prospered culturally, and some notable figures held high posts in the Caliphate of Cordoba. Jewish philosophers, mathematicians, astronomers, poets and rabbinical scholars left behind highly rich cultural and scientific work. Many devoted themselves to the study of the sciences and philosophy, composing

many of the most valuable texts of Jewish philosophy, and the Jews of the region took part in the overall prosperity of Muslim Al-Andalus.

In the following centuries, Jewish thought flourished under famous figures such as Samuel Ha-Nagid, Moses ibn Ezra, Solomon ibn Gabirol and Judah Halevi, as well as Moses Maimonides. During 'Abd al-Rahman's reign, the scholar Moses ben Enoch was appointed rabbi of Córdoba, and as a consequence al-Andalus became the center of Talmudic study and Córdoba the meeting-place of Jewish savants. In 1027, a Jewish military official, Samuel ibn Naghrillah, became the top advisor and military general of the Muslim-controlled Taifa of Granada, an emirate of southern Spain.

Phoenicians, Greeks, Vandals, Visigoths, Muslims, Jews, and Christians all occupied Spain at one point or another. History records communities of Jews living on the Iberian Peninsula from as early as the destruction of the first temple in Jerusalem. But it was during the realm of the Moors in Al-Andalus that the Jews thrived the greatest. Although this was a time of artistic, educational, and cultural enlightenment, it was not completely serene or without persecution for the Jewish people. But as historians look back before the first millennium at the Jewish populations of Iberia, we see Jews living in convergence with both Muslims and Christians.

The occupation of Iberia by the Moors was a welcome occurrence for the remaining Jewish population there. The Muslims were not entirely tolerant, but under the ruling Caliph, the Jews were able to preserve their rites and traditions. Peaceful coexistence led to their economic and social expansion. Their status was that of "dhimmis"—that is, of non-Muslims living in a land governed by Muslims. The Jews had limited autonomy, yet full rights to practice their religion, as well as full protection by their Muslim rulers. There was a specific tax called the *jizya* that dhimmis had to pay to receive these benefits, however. This tax, higher than the tax Muslims had to pay, was in several occasions one of the most important sources of income for the kingdom.

These administrative necessities aside, from the second half of the eighth century to the end of the eleventh century Jewish life flourished while contributing greatly to scholarship. A translating program was established in Toledo, using Jews as interpreters. There they translated the Arabic books into romance languages, as well as Greek and Hebrew texts into Arabic. This included many major works of Greek science and philosophy, and Jews studied and contributed to mathematics, medicine, botany, geography, poetry, and philosophy. It was at this time that the study of medicine expanded to produce a large number of exceptional Jewish physicians, and all the while Islam held sway over Jewish cultural life as well. In literature, and the arts, the Muslim influence on Jewish thought was quite substantial. Though written in non-Islamic language and script, medieval Hebrew poetry and much of the prose literature belong to the same cultural world as Arabic and other literatures of Islam.

The Jewish dimension became increasingly important in the Caliphate of Córdoba, the center of Islamic cultural life in Al-Andalus, reaching its peak in the tenth century. Jews lived among themselves in a walled area known as the *aljama* (Jewish quarter). There they enjoyed their own administration, managed their own communal affairs and had their own legal court known as the "Beit Din." This was naturally a very great freedom for them and also decreased the workload of the Islamic courts.

Having invaded the areas throughout southern Spain, and coming to rule in a matter of seven years, Islamic rulers were confronted with many questions relating to the implementation of Islamic Rule on a non-Islamic society. The coexistence of Muslims, Jews, and Christians during this time was celebrated by many writers, and Al-Andalus, became the center of Jewish life during the early Middle Ages, producing important scholars and one of the most stable and wealthy Jewish communities of the day. It was a relatively educated society for the Muslim occupiers and their Jewish collaborators, as well as Christians who openly collaborated with the Muslims and Jews.



Dialogues of Beauty & The Power of Art: The Barenboim Said Foundation:

The Barenboim-Said Foundation stands as one of the great examples of the power of art over politics, ideology and racial, religious and ethnic strife. It was established in 2003 by late Palestinian intellectual and scholar, Edward Said, and the renowned Israeli pianist and conductor, Daniel Barenboim. These two founders believed that music profoundly influences human life, they created their foundation to make classical music education accessible to Palestinian children and young adults. Through its activities at their Music Center in Ramallah, the foundation serves Palestinian adolescents regardless of their social or economic background, offering them the highest level of education.

It was a chance meeting that brought the two humanists together in a London hotel lobby in 1992. A friendly exchange about music, literature, society and the Middle Eastern conflict grew into a deep personal friendship that lasted until Edward Said's untimely death in 2003. The spirit of this extraordinary relationship was captured in their joint publication *Parallels and Paradoxes*, a work that details their idea of creating an orchestra in which musicians from Israel, Palestine, the Middle East and North Africa would play together – harmonized in music – and thus create a foundation for mutual understanding. Barenboim spoke of the ensemble as follows:

"The East-West Divan Orchestra is not a love story, and it is not a peace story. It has very flatteringly been described as a project for peace. It isn't. It's not going to bring peace, whether you play well or not so well. The Divan was conceived as a project against ignorance. A project against the fact that it is absolutely essential for people to get to know the other, to understand what the other thinks and feels, without necessarily agreeing with it. I'm not trying to convert the Arab members of the Divan to the Israeli point of view, and [I'm] not trying to convince the Israelis of the Arab point of view. But



Separation between peoples is not a solution for any of the problems that divide peoples.

And certainly ignorance of the other provides no help whatever. Cooperation and coexistence of the kind that music lived as we have lived, performed, shared and loved it together, might be."

— the late Edward Said, philosopher, author and Palestinian activist



The Pierre Boulez Saal of the Barenboim-Said Akademie

Source: Jroepstorff

I want to – and unfortunately I am alone in this now that Edward died a few years ago – ...create a platform where the two sides can disagree and not resort to [violence].”

The orchestra was co-founded in Weimar, Germany, by Said and Barenboim in 1999, and named after the *West-östlicher Divan* (*West-Eastern Divan*), an anthology of poems by Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, who took his inspiration from the Persian poet Hafis. The first ensemble workshop took place in 1999, as part of Weimar’s program as the European Capital of Culture that year. Since Edward Said’s death, his widow Mariam C. Said has been a co-leader of the orchestra.

While tension and conflict in the Middle East continued, the West-Eastern Divan Orchestra developed into an international success story, with performances from Tokyo to Ramallah, from Berlin to Seville and Abu Dhabi, from New York to Buenos Aires and Rabat. They then set about raising funds for an academy that would offer music students from all over the Middle East training in classical music and philosophy, and other instruction in the arts. The Barenboim–Said Academy, the academic setting behind this devotion to art, builds on “the principles and practices laid out in the work of the West-Eastern Divan Orchestra” and transfer them into a scholarly setting, drawing upon the philosophical concepts of the two men.

Barenboim’s vision for classical music, Berlin and the Middle East was achieved in December 2016 when the Barenboim–Said Academy, named for the maestro and the Palestinian-American intellectual Edward Said, opened in the historic heart of the German capital. Mr. Barenboim, 74, who is also the musical director of Berlin’s State Opera, “himself seemed a little stunned by the opening,” as *The New York Times* reported at the time. The German culture ministry provided two-thirds of the 35 million euro construction costs (about \$37 million) for the academy – with the remainder coming from private sponsors. The building contains a brand new concert hall, designed *pro bono* by Frank Gehry and named after Pierre Boulez,

an avid supporter of the idea and a close friend of Mr. Barenboim’s.

The arts have great power to speak to the soul and provide neutral ground for people of differing views. This Israeli-Palestinian humanitarian initiative can be a model to all those who still believe that differences, ignorance and historical tensions may be overcome through civilized cultural values.



The Pierre Boulez Saal of the Barenboim–Said Akademie

Source: Jroepstorff



Great music is the result of concentrated listening – every musician listening intently to the voice of the composer and to each other. Harmony in personal or international relations can also only exist by listening, each party opening its ears to the other’s narrative or point of view.”

— Daniel Barenboim, pianist and conductor



Greater Understanding for the Foundation for Ethnic Understanding

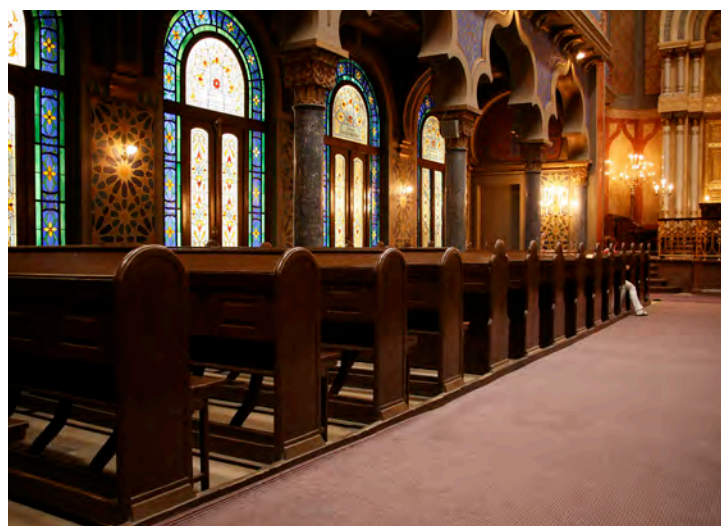


For my part, as someone who has been involved in Muslim-Jewish relations for more than 15 years and has come to know Muslims of all ranks of life, I am confident that there are many more Mohammed Al-Issas and Asma Shuweikhs out there who will not sit still or look away when Jews are being threatened or attacked. At a difficult moment in history that is some good news that we should never allow ourselves to forget."

— Rabbi Marc Schneier, Founder and Director, The Foundation for Ethnic Understanding.

Since 2007, the Foundation for Ethnic Understanding, led by Rabbi Marc Schneier and the entrepreneur Russell Simmons, has made improving Muslim-Jewish Relations their main focus. They have hosted the National Summit of Imams and Rabbis in 2007, the Gathering of Muslim and Jewish Leaders in Brussels in 2010 and in Paris in 2012, and since then regular Missions of Muslim and Jewish Leaders to Washington D.C. In addition, each November the Foundation hosts the "Weekend of Twinning," which encourages Muslims and Jews, Imams and Rabbis, Mosques and synagogues, and Muslim and Jewish organizations to hold joint programming inspired by the commonalities between Muslims and Jews. It is one of the most high-profile interfaith, Muslim-Jewish dialogue forums in the world.

The FFEU was founded in 1989 by Rabbi Marc Schneier and the late Joseph Papp while tensions were increasing between the Jewish and African-American communities. For more than two decades, the FFEU was instrumental in repairing this historic alliance. In 2014, as it celebrated its 25th anniversary, the FFEU was honored by the United States Congress as the national address for Black-Jewish relations.



The Muslim World League has formed strong friendships with Jewish community leaders around the world, leading by example in building bridges through dialogue.



There is a false narrative out there that Muslims are inveterately hostile to Jews. In fact, Muslims are speaking out – and acting out – every day in defense of Jews who are under attack"

— Rabbi Marc Schneier

Rabbi Marc Schneier: “Muslims Stood Up Repeatedly for Jews in 2019” – The Jerusalem Post, December 23, 2019. (Excerpts)

“The proliferation of antisemitic attacks this year in the United States and globally shook the global Jewish community to its core – the attack on the Chabad of Poway Synagogue, a synagogue in Halle, Germany, the kosher supermarket in Jersey City, New Jersey, this month, and unfortunately, the list goes on and on. However, amid our grief, fear and anger at these escalating attacks, and at increased demonization of Israel from the likes of the Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions (BDS) movement, it is important for Jews to realize that we are not alone but have allies in the Muslim community.

“There is a false narrative out there that Muslims are inveterately hostile to Jews. In fact, Muslims are speaking out – and acting out – every day in defense of Jews who are under attack. Consider the following inspiring examples of Muslims standing up for Jews during the past year:

“On Holocaust Remembrance Day in January, Mohammad Al-Issa, secretary-general of the Muslim World League, backed by the government of Saudi Arabia and based in holy city of Mecca, wrote an op-ed in The Washington Post titled “Why Muslims From Around the World should Remember the Holocaust.” Taking vigorous issue with those in the Muslim world who have trafficked in Holocaust denial, Al-Issa wrote, “The lessons of Holocaust are universal and Muslims around the world have a responsibility to learn them, heed the warnings and join the international commitment to ensure ‘never again.’”

“In October, Al-Issa took another groundbreaking stand by issuing a strong condemnation of an antisemitic incident in Australia in which a Jewish boy was bullied into kissing the shoes of a Muslim boy. He shared, “This shameful behavior is contrary to the doctrine of Islam and they are barbaric acts.... Examples from the Holy Scriptures abound of the importance of respecting Jews. The Prophet, peace be upon him, stood solemnly at the funeral of a Jew.”

“In the wake of the Poway, Halle and Jersey City attacks on Jews, leaders of local and national Muslim organizations spoke out at news conferences condemning the attacks in uncategorical terms and offered emotional succor and financial support to families of the victims and

to the Jewish community. Jim Sues, executive director of the New Jersey Chapter of the Council on American-Muslim Relations said, “We stand in solidarity with our Jewish sisters and brothers and ask people of all faiths and backgrounds to repudiate the hatred that apparently motivated this heinous attack.”

“Jews in Minnesota, and across America, were deeply hurt and alarmed by comments by Rep. Ilhan Omar (D-Minnesota), who suggested that US support for Israel is “all about the Benjamins,” and that Jewish supporters of Israel are more loyal to that state than to the US. While Omar’s ugly comments were deeply disturbing, it is important to note that many American Muslims denounced them.

“In November, public figures from 15 Arab countries met in London and denounced the BDS movement against Israel and called for direct person-to-person contacts between Israelis and citizens of their respective societies. This group, the Arab Council for Regional Integration, called for mending relations with Israel not only as path to peace, but a way to mend relations with Israel and also to heal some of the greatest internal problems in their own countries.

“It wasn’t only prominent Muslim clerics and political leaders who drew worldwide attention by defending beleaguered Jews. Last month, a Muslim woman named Asma Shuweikh noticed a man spouting antisemitic vitriol at a Jewish family on the London Underground. As seen in a video that went viral on YouTube, the deranged man is seen haranguing the Jewish children about “synagogues of Satan,” until Shuweikh steps in tells him to cut out his harassment. The man turns threateningly on her, but she stands her ground.

“For my part, as someone who has been involved in Muslim-Jewish relations for more than 15 years and has come to know Muslims of all ranks of life, I am confident that there are many more Mohammed Al-Issas and Asma Shuweikhs out there who will not sit still or look away when Jews are being threatened or attacked. At a difficult moment in history that is some good news that we should never allow ourselves to forget.

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