

IJCIC

International Jewish Committee on Interreligious Consultations

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Seek Peace and Pursue It: A Jewish Call to Muslim-Jewish Dialogue

We write this letter with the hope that it reaches all those Jews and Muslims committed to the injunction “Seek peace and pursue it.” (Psalms 34:15) We recognize the great need in our time to allow religion to serve as an inroad between our communities rather than as a divisive wedge. We write this letter at a time in which many claim to speak on our behalves. Many of these voices speak from a stance of moderation, love of God and respect for the dignity of all people as did the recent “Call to Peace, Dialogue and Understanding between Muslims and Jews.” Unfortunately, others perpetrate the grossest forms of violence and stereo-typing in the name of religion. We write this letter to reach out and respond to the former, those who seek peace - and to repudiate the latter, those who preach hatred. As Jewish leaders we write this letter with the hope it reaches those with whom we might fulfill the words of the prophets “to do justice, to love kindness, And to walk humbly with God.” (Micah 6:8) As such, we respectfully extend this message to our Muslim brothers and sisters accordingly.

We are fully aware that both of our religious communities have a robust tradition of varying interpretations of sacred text and religious principles, often yielding competing understandings. We call to dialogue all of those who affirm that our mandate as leaders is to guide our communities in accordance with values which benefit all of human society and the world at large.

There is now a dangerous and widespread misconception that an innate hostility exists between Judaism and Islam. We believe that this misconception leads to a travesty of the transcendent values of our respective heritages and a denial of the noblest periods of our mutual history. Judaism and Islam have historically shared much in common, and it is instructive for both of our religions to continue to explore how our respective religious understandings have evolved, often in relationship to one another.

It is important to affirm the dynamic history of interaction that our communities have shared with one another. During these many centuries we have had times and places of shared destiny and remarkable achievement. We look back on some of these periods as a Golden Age. Even as the percentage of Jews living in Muslim lands decreased there were always Muslim societies which were hospitable to the Jewish people and in which a heritage of fruitful cooperation and coexistence between the religious communities prevailed. Furthermore, there have always been and remain several lands which are neither Jewish nor Muslim in which our communities have lived side by side in co-existence. We also recognize that this welcome and openness was not universal, and as a result there is now considerable ambivalence about how we are to understand each other's views and values.

Accordingly, those of us who are informed by and are leaders of our respective religious communities have a particular mandate to highlight the common repudiation in Judaism and Islam of murder, violence, injustice and indignity. Further, we must seek to reaffirm the commandments in our respective Faiths to pursue peace and to affirm the dignity of the other. As Jews we often base the affirmation of human dignity in the notion that all human beings are created *B'Tzelem Elohim*, with Godliness.

As believers in the One Creator and Guide of the Universe, referred to in both our Traditions as the Merciful One, who demands mercy and compassion of us all, it is essential to recapture and develop the spirit of Jewish-Muslim dialogue and mutual respect. True love of God demands this dialogue, not only to uphold the aforementioned sublime teachings and to recapture the historical memory of mutual cooperation, but in order to facilitate genuine reconciliation among the different faith communities, between Muslims and Jews everywhere, and also for the sake of relations between the Muslim world and the non-Muslim world at large.

We invite your participation in the development of this dialogue, and will welcome your engagement with us in pursuit of a world made better through our efforts.

The International Jewish Committee on Interreligious Consultations (IJCIC) is a coalition of Jewish organizations representing world Jewry to other religions. IJCIC's member organizations are American Jewish Committee, American Jewish Congress, Anti-Defamation League, B'nai B'rith International, Central Conference of American Rabbis, Israel Jewish Council on Interreligious Relations, Rabbinical Assembly, Rabbinical Council of America, Union of Orthodox Hebrew Congregations, Union for Reform Judaism, United Synagogue of Conservative Judaism, World Jewish Congress