

Report of the Interreligious Iftar Seminar on

Interreligious Dialogue from a Muslim Perspective

August 3, 2010

**at the Konrad Adenauer Conference Center in
Jerusalem**

Hosted by the KAS in partnership with ICCI



**Report submitted by Dr. Ron Kronish,
Director, ICCI**

August 11, 2011



Approximately 70 religious leaders and guests – Muslim, Christian, Druze and Jewish – gathered at the Konrad Adenauer Conference Center at Mishkenot Sha'ananim in Jerusalem on August 3, 2011 to discuss the significance of interreligious dialogue in Israel.

After the discussion, the participants ate an iftar meal together, the traditional meal breaking the daily fast of Ramadan.

Overall Objective

By inviting non-Muslims to participate in a Ramadan event with Muslims, ICCI and KAS wished to honor the Muslims and to give them a chance to share their culture and religion with others. Our goal in bringing together Jewish, Muslim, Druze, and Christian religious leaders for this special seminar was to bring about greater interreligious understanding in order to enable us to live together in peace in this land, and to get this message out to the general public in Israel via the media.

Greetings

Dr. Michael Mertes, Resident Representative of the Konrad Adenauer Foundation (KAS) to Israel in Jerusalem, opened the event by greeting the participants and expressing his pleasure in hosting this and similar events.



Rabbi Dr. Ron Kronish, director the Interreligious Coordinating Council in Israel (ICCI) briefly spoke about ICCI's interreligious work and the purpose of the event, and introduced the speakers. He expressed thanks to KAS for hosting this event.

Keynote Presentation



Kadi Iyad Zahalka, the kadi (judge in the Muslim courts of Israel) of Haifa, spoke in Hebrew about how the Koran encourages Muslims to engage in interreligious dialogue and how it promotes the same universal values—such as respect for life, tolerance and the renunciation of violence—that are common to all three monotheistic religions. He added, however, that when another religious group persecutes Muslims for their religious beliefs, the Koran opposes interreligious dialogue and calls on them to take action. Therefore, he emphasized the importance of equality and respect among the three

religions when their members engage each other in dialogue. Interreligious dialogue—or getting to know members of another religious group—is a necessary medium through which mutual equality and respect develop, he added. In his concluding remarks, Kadi Zahalka praised the American model of citizenship, which elevates citizenship over religious affiliation so that all Americans are viewed as equal despite religious differences.

Respondents

Rabbi Levi Weiman-Kelman, the rabbi of Kehillat Kol HaNeshama in Jerusalem, discussed how his personal experiences in interreligious dialogue have deepened his understanding of his Jewish faith. As an example, he mentioned that by learning about the significance of the Ramadan fast in Islam, he gained a wider perspective on the meaning of fasting in Judaism. Furthermore, Rabbi Weiman-Kelman said that his meetings with Muslim and Christian clergy encouraged him to contemplate and challenge his religious beliefs when he has to explain Judaism to non-Jews.



Reverend Cannon Hosam Naoum of St. George's Cathedral in Jerusalem continued the discussion about fasting, remarking that not only is it a common tradition in each monotheistic religion, but that its purpose—connecting man to God—is also shared among the religions. He compared religious fasting to the current hunger strike that an Israeli doctor has undertaken amid the

nationwide protests that advocate for government intervention in the deteriorating quality of life in Israel. His point was that fasting is not simply to deprive oneself of food but rather to achieve an altruistic goal. In religious fasting, the goal is to cultivate a relationship with God, and through God to learn about His message of tolerance and love for one's fellow man. In the absence of this understanding and acquaintance with God—the purpose of the fast—the fast itself is devoid of meaning. He concluded by highlighting the unity between the three monotheistic religions and stressing that their members all pray and strive to understand the same God.

Discussion

These presentations prompted several responses from the audience, focused on the emotional, political, spiritual, religious and cultural aspects of fasting and of interreligious dialogue. The comments that were offered by the participants include the following:

Ori Sherman, an orthodox Jew, commented on the significant similarities between the different religions regarding the concept of fasting.

Tareq Samman, an alumnus of ICCI's Jerusalem Interreligious Young Adult Forum program and the current coordinator of its alumni community, questioned Kadi Zahalka's use of the Hebrew language to deliver his speech about the Koran. He suggested that this does not align with the spirit of interreligious equality embodied in such an event. Kadi Zahalka defended his decision by explaining that his message about Islam was for Jewish Israelis and thus best communicated in their native language.





Sheikh Abd El Salam Manasra of Nazareth, Sheikh of the Salam Qaderite Order and General Secretary of the High Islamic Sufi Council in Jerusalem and the Holy Land, took exception to Kadi Zahalka's veneration of the United States because of the pervasive anti-Muslim rhetoric now present in that country. Kadi Zahalka responded that he does not endorse the actions of all Americans, but rather that he was impressed by the space provided for religious plurality and equality in the country.

Sheikh Manasra additionally challenged Rabbi Weiman-Kelman's assertion that Abraham was Jewish, to which the rabbi responded by saying that he relates to his "father" Abraham as a Jew, but that his relationship with Abraham does not discount the unique relationships his "brothers," Muslims and Christians, have with the same father.

Imam Khalid Abu Ras, an imam from the Galilee and high school teacher in Nazareth, briefly spoke about Ramadan and iftar, and introduced two Sufi sheikhs who chanted Muslim religious verses to the audience. The first of these, Sheikh Hilmi Hammed, recited relevant segments the Koran's Surat al-Baqarah, dealing with the fast of Ramadan. This was followed with a chant of the prayer traditionally spoken before the end of the fast and the beginning of the iftar meal, performed by the *mu'azin* of Ilut village, Sheikh Mokhi Aldin Abu Ayash.

Iftar Dinner

A prayer was offered by one of the Muslim religious leaders and then everyone sat together and enjoyed a delicious iftar dinner, during which there was much opportunity for informal conversation and getting-acquainted with the members of the 4 religions who attended this event.

Translation

Simultaneous translation was offered between Arabic/Hebrew/English during the entire seminar.

Transportation

A bus was provided for those religious leaders who came from the Galilee. This was organized in cooperation with the Dept. of Religious Affairs of the Ministry of Interior.

Press and Publicity

A press release announcing this upcoming event was sent out to members of the local press (see Appendix A). Approximately 8 members of the press attended, including representatives from Kol Israel Radio, The Jerusalem Post, Ha'aretz Newspaper. The following reports appeared in the Jerusalem Post and Haaretz on Friday, August 5, 2010:

<http://www.jpost.com/JewishWorld/JewishNews/Article.aspx?id=232583&R=R5>
<http://www.haaretz.com/weekend/anglo-file/rank-and-file-1.377050>

The event was also mentioned in the "Grapevine" section of the Jerusalem Post (<http://www.jpost.com/Features/InTheSpotlight/Article.aspx?id=232545&R=R44>), and covered by Kol Yisrael in Arabic radio station.

Appendix A – Press Release



Religions for Peace 

The Interreligious Coordinating Council In Israel

מועצה בין דתית מתאמת בישראל (ע"ד)

مجلس التنسيق بين الأديان في إسرائيل



Konrad
Adenauer
Stiftung

Interreligious Iftar Celebration

featuring a discussion about
Interreligious Dialogue from a Muslim Perspective

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

July 28, 2011, Jerusalem

Religious leaders in Israel of the three monotheistic faiths will gather in Jerusalem on Wednesday night, August 3, to break the daily fast during Ramadan and discuss the topic of interreligious dialogue in Israel.

After the inaugural event last year met with resounding success, the Interreligious Coordinating Council in Israel (ICCI) and the Konrad Adenauer Foundation (KAS) have decided to host again a similar seminar, inviting the Kadi of Haifa, Mr. Iyad Zahalka, to speak about "Interreligious Dialogue from a Muslim Perspective."

In attendance will be religious leaders and educators from the Jewish, Muslim and Christian faiths in Jerusalem and the Galilee, including a Sufi group from Nazareth, whose imam will chant verses from the Koran. In addition, young adult alumni of ICCI's various interfaith programs will attend.

Kadi Zahalka, in addition to being the Kadi of Haifa, is an accomplished lecturer, author and activist. He is currently writing his doctoral thesis at Hebrew University on Islamic Jurisprudence for Muslim Minorities. Following Kadi Zahalka's remarks will be responses by Jerusalem religious leaders, Rabbi Levi Weiman-Kelman of Kehillat Kol HaNeshama Synagogue and The Rev. Cannon Hosam Naoum of St. George's Cathedral.

The event will take place at the Konrad Adenauer Conference Center in Mishkenot Sha'ananim in Jerusalem. Guests are expected to arrive and register starting at 17:45, with the discussion commencing at 18:15, followed by a reception and dinner at 19:40. There will be simultaneous translations of the speakers' remarks in Arabic, Hebrew and/or English.

For further information or to confirm your participation, please contact our office (t: 02-561-1899; f: 02-563-4148) or email us at communications@icci.org.il.

About ICCI: Founded in January 1991, the [Interreligious Coordinating Council in Israel](http://www.icci.org.il) (ICCI) comprises more than 60 Christian, Muslim, and Jewish institutions, including Jewish-Arab coexistence organizations, museums, universities, and ecumenical organizations. ICCI's mission is to harness the teachings and values of different religious faiths in the region and transform religious leaders and their

followers in Israel and the region into sources of reconciliation and peaceful coexistence.

About KAS: The [Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung](#) is a German political foundation that sponsors civic education programs worldwide aimed at promoting freedom and liberty, peace, and justice. Its offices abroad are in charge of more than 200 projects in more than 120 countries. In Israel, KAS's mission is to contribute to the improvement of German-Israeli relations, promote the harmonious co-existence of the different peoples in Israel, and to support all efforts for peace in Israel and the Middle East.