



MAPPING REPORTS OF JEWISH MUSLIM DIALOGUE IN 5 EUROPEAN COUNTRIES



Compendium of Good Practice
An Initiative of CEJI –
A Jewish Contribution to an Inclusive Europe



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Background to the Project

In the context of both the incredible diversity of the societies in which we now live and the volatile political situation of the last few years, there have been renewed levels of tensions between religious communities and in particular between Jews and Muslims. At the same time Jews and Muslims find themselves not only as perceived enemies but also as possible partners because of the threat of radical political views gaining strength in the broader community. In 2005, CEJI – a Jewish contribution to an inclusive Europe - began an initiative to foster and promote dialogue and understanding between our two communities, seeing it not only essential for our own well-being but also to strengthen the vision of a diverse world to which we aspire.

Much work has been going at the local level on the ground but ideas and practices are rarely shared. The people involved at a local level often feel isolated, and lacking in support, at times feeling that they are operating in a vacuum, as they try to generate dialogue between the two communities. The production of these Mapping Reports for the 5 partner countries involved in the project (Belgium, Denmark, France, the Netherlands and United Kingdom) intends to begin to address these issues by publicising and promoting existing dialogue initiatives.

The Mapping Reports led to the First European Jewish Muslim Dialogue Conference, which was held in April 2007. This event aimed to facilitate the exchange of information and to gather positive experiences from the five partner countries. Out of the conference came the recognition that dialogue is not enough and that cooperation is also needed, and as a result the European Platform for Jewish Muslim Cooperation was set up. The Platform is made up of Jewish and Muslim organisations involved in local and national level dialogue initiatives, and who are committed to developing cooperative actions between their communities.



BELGIUM



Introduction

As in many other European countries, initiatives to organise, support and maintain good relations between the Jewish and the Maghreb, Arab and Muslim communities of Belgium, have been taking place for several years.

Before going into detail concerning the nature and the originators of these positive inter community relations, it is important to describe the social and historical context of these two communities.

Jewish Community of Belgium

- ▶ The Belgian Jews are a population of immigrant origin, and mostly well integrated into the local population.

They came to Belgium long before the creation of the Belgian state (in 1830), and as early as in the Middle Ages¹. The current community mostly came from Eastern European countries (especially Poland), during the 20th century. Born in Belgium, most are non-observant but traditionalist or secular Jews, involved or not in community life but rarely religious. In Brussels, the liberal synagogue is the only one to possess an important following and to offer frequent activities: Talmud classes, conferences, newspaper, singing choir...etc. The more recent dynamism of the main synagogue on rue de la Régence should also be mentioned.

Others have wandered away from their parent's traditions, and are completely assimilated. In their case, only their name (sometimes) and their origin link them to the Jewish people. A minority of Belgian Orthodox Jews live in a close-knit community, separate from their surroundings and with very little interaction with the outside world. Most of these Orthodox Jews live in Antwerp.

It is in Antwerp, as well as Brussels, Gent, Ostend, Liege, Charleroi, and Arlon and more recently, in Waterloo (Walloon Brabant), that Jewish communities or synagogues have a presence. Very few Jews live outside of these cities, and those that do often have no links to any Jewish organisations.

A community of immigrant origin, its members have known the classic journey of any foreign population settling in a new country. Mostly poor immigrants (working class and artisans), they came from Eastern European: Poland, Russia (later on USSR), Hungary, Rumania... They came as either political (very often Communists) or economic refugees. Another wave of immigrants came from Germany arrived on the verge of World War II. During the occupation of Belgium (1940-1944), the Jews were largely deported² (95% were foreigners or stateless). The vast majority of those deported to the death camps never came back. After the war, the Jewish community renewed and reorganised itself, and many new organisations were created (support for the camp survivors and war orphans, cultural, sport, political organisations...) «Jewish life» became alive again and it grew rapidly. Some Jews – many of whom had been part of the «resistance» and their children – became politically active within the pro-USSR Communist party. In the sixties, some of them became Maoists, while others chose to join the Socialist party. At the time, the Jewish community mostly sympathized with the left wing.

¹ Séverine ZAJTMAN: «*Jewish and Moroccan immigrations in Belgian territories. Belgium, as is Europe, is an immigration land. Overview*», this article was first published in December 2004 in the catalogue of the «Cultural Judeo-Moroccan Encounters» and later on «Wafin», the website of the Moroccans of Belgium (www.wafin.be): www.wafin.be/articles/archives/immigrationsjuivesetmarocaines.phtml

² Maxime STEINBERG: «*Dossier Bruxelles-Auschwitz*», published 1980 by a private support committee.



At the same time, integration with the Belgian population was taking place at a professional level. Born from traders or manual workers, many Jews attended university and the Jewish community of today, mostly Ashkenazi, is composed of doctors, lawyers, journalist, and teachers.

There is also a small Sephardic community. The Sephardic community includes the Portuguese Sephardic synagogue «Beth Moshe» in Antwerp, and the synagogue «Simon et Lina Haïm» in the Brussels commune of Schaerbeek, as well as a cultural organisation, the European Sephardic Institute³ which is situated in Brussels, and produces «*Los Muestros –The voice of Sephardics*». The Belgian Sephardics came from Maghreb (mostly Morocco), or are «Rhodes Jews»⁴ who came from Congo after independence⁵, as well as Levantine and Egyptian Jews. For example, Moïse Rahmani, the president of the European Sephardic Institute and producer of the «*Belsef*» is of Egyptian origin.

For the most part, the Jewish community lives in big cities and is well integrated into Belgian society. It has 35 000 to 40 000 members, of which 25% are observant Jews and 75% are Jews by tradition or culture only. Politically, it is very diverse but the community votes mostly for the socialist (sp.a in Flanders, PS for the French speaking community) and the liberal parties (VLD, MR or FDF). A small minority supports the ecologist parties (Groen! and Ecolo). A few of elected representatives are Jewish (commune counsellors, regional and federal deputies and senators) or of Jewish origin.

The Jewish press is quite diverse because all the Jewish organisations and synagogues publish their own newsletter or magazine, though each has a limited distribution. Also worth mentioning, is the community radio, Radio Judaïca, located in Brussels and managed by the Cercle Ben Gourion.

Despite a mostly successful integration, the Belgian Jewish Community still suffers from regular attacks. These verbal or physical attacks are committed by «true Belgians» as well as by Belgians of foreign origin. Within the extreme right, historical antisemitic racism continues, as well as within fundamentalist Christian organisations. A cultural and religious antisemitism is also emerging and spreading within the Maghrebin, Arab and Muslim communities.

The Maghrebin, Arab and Muslim Community of Belgium

- ▶ The presence of these communities is much more recent.⁶ Immigrants from north-African countries arrived during the twenties, but on a very limited scale. (In 1920, the available statistics mention 361 North-African immigrants, of which 51 came from Morocco⁷). During WW2, as in WW1, North-African infantry soldiers participated in European combat on the allied side, and especially in Belgium, helped to fight against the Nazi occupying force.

However, in the 1960's, at the request of Belgian industry, large-scale Moroccan immigration was organised by the government through a Belgian-Moroccan governmental agreement, which was signed in 1964. At the beginning, Moroccan workers arrived without their families to work for the industrial and mining sectors. Later on, thanks to the «Gol legislation», which introduced family regrouping, their wives and children joined them in Belgium. They lived in the poor parts of Brussels, the same ones that Jews had inhabited a few decades earlier. The immigrant families - from Morocco (mostly from mountain and agricultural districts but also from Tangiers and Casablanca), and on a lesser scale, from Algeria - moved to large the Belgian cities, the industrial centres and the

³ www.sefarad.org

⁴ Moïse RAHMANI : «Rhodes, un pan de mémoire» (Rhodes, a part of history) Published by Romillat 2000.

⁵ Moïse RAHMANI : «Shalom Bwana, la saga des Juifs du Congo» (Shalom Bwana, the saga of the Jews of Congo) Published by Romillat 2002.

⁶ Séverine Zajtmán, *ibid*

⁷ Statistic of the Ministry of Justice, published in 1920 and referenced in «*The Moroccan 'immigration in Belgium*», chapter of Anne FRENNET-DE KEYSER, pages 329 to 354, in «*History of foreigners ... and of immigration in Belgium, from pre-history until today*», under the direction of Anne MORELLI, published by Couleur livres, Charleroi, 2004.



mining regions. Mostly of Berber origin, these families live alongside other immigrant populations: from Italy, Spain, Greece, Portugal, and Turkey and in the 1990's, from Sub-Sahara Africa.

This economic immigration, as others before it, was characterised by a total lack of planning for integration and welcome. As working-class people, the Moroccans of Belgium were severely hit by the economic crisis and the closing of many industrial plants and mines in the early 1970's. This crisis only grew worse as time went on.

Arriving after many other waves of immigration, and ending quickly because of the economic crisis the Moroccans of Belgium, and were not able to benefit from the integration that earlier immigrants had obtained. The majority of the North African population became victims of discrimination in terms of lodging, studying and employment. They will continue to be the target of an ever-present racism, perpetrated by the extreme right parties (Vlams Belang/Front National). Some Moroccan immigrants— no doubt in reaction to the racism they suffer — have developed their own racist attitude towards «Belgians by birth» and also towards other immigrant populations. Antisemitism also develops in these communities with the emergence of Islamic fundamentalism.

Despite a weak Maghreb population, some second or third generation youth, have managed to achieve upward social mobility, through their motivation and courage, and thanks to higher education. Today, in cities such as Brussels or Antwerp, there are numerous doctors, lawyers, dentists, nurses, teachers, social workers, managers and journalists of North African origins. Thanks to their naturalisation, many Maghrebins or Turks by birth are becoming more and more politically active. Today many local councillors (conseillers communaux and, échevins), federal and regional deputies (députés régionaux and députés fédéraux) and even Ministers are of Moroccan origin. For example, the current Minister of Culture for the French Community is of Moroccan origin and the Brussels Regional Minister for clean cities is of Turkish origin. In contrast with the Jewish community, their vote is spread evenly over different political parties. Indeed, all the parties, except for the extreme right but including the former Social Christian party (PSC), now the Social Humanist Centre (CDH), benefit from votes of, and have amongst their membership, people of Maghreb origin.⁸

The Maghreb community is mostly Sunnite. For some years, Shiite organisations — which are often characterised by a more fundamentalist and radical approach — have been trying to recruit in the immigrant neighbourhoods. Some sources say that the number of Sunnite moving to Shiite is on the rise, but the Sunnites still outnumber the Shiites. Globally, there is a radicalisation taking place and religious observance is on the rise. There is also an emergence of a Sufi movement, attracting well-educated Muslims.

All this does not prevent open-minded modern Muslims from expressing their views on their religion. For Example the «Islam d'ouverture Collectif», created during the summer of 2006. Some non-religious Muslims also voice their opinions. Largely outnumbered, they are often active within democratic political parties or as members of academia.

It is not easy to give an exact number for the Maghreb population of Belgium, especially because many have become naturalised Belgians. In 1993 there were 144.993 Moroccans (the largest North African population) living in Belgium. In 2003, they were 83 631, which means that 60 000 had become naturalised.⁹

Inter-community Conflicts

- ▶ The path of a multi-cultural society is not always smooth, especially in a nation composed of different populations characterised by cultural difference. When these different populations gather under one umbrella organisation (Consistory, Ccojb etc.), they can, together, constitute a dynamic and enriching force, but these very differences can also create ten-

⁸ According to a study of the Centre of political sciences at the Université Libre De Bruxelles (Cevipol), in the regional elections of June 2004 amongst the voters for Vlaams Blok/Belang in Brussels, 4.5% were Muslim.

⁹ Source: Nicolas PERRIN, GÉDAP-UCL Department of Sciences, Population and Development of the Catholic University of Louvain-La-Neuve, 2004.



sions. Hostility from part of the Belgian population toward immigrants is expressed more and more through election votes in favour of the racist extreme-right political parties. There is also some intra-community racism. One notes xenophobic and racist attitudes amongst immigrants toward other immigrant populations. There have been conflicts, even violent ones, between Turks and Kurds, between Congolese and Rwandese, in the streets of Brussels and anti-white racism is also emerging.

It is also worth mentioning the continuing historical antisemitism, in the current international context, specifically the Middle East. Anti-Jewish racism, as well as anti-Zionism, is supported, exploited and promoted by Islamic fundamentalist organisations, which are often well established. Following the second Intifada (October 2000) and also after 9/11, there has been an alarming rise of antisemitism.

On the other hand, there is a radicalisation of part of the Jewish community, especially in Antwerp, where some people are voting in favour of the Vlaams Blok / Belang, even though neo-Nazis and antisemites founded this party. Indeed, the VB is now considered the only political party fighting against Islam.

The on-going tensions and intra-communities conflicts constitute an obstacle to good relations between the Jewish community and the Maghrebin Arab and Muslim communities. Nevertheless, dialogues initiatives do take place. Alongside divergent perceptions of the Middle-East conflict, socio-cultural differences are another factor for further disagreement.

Inter-Community Relations

- ▶ Despite an unfavourable context and socio-economical differences, constructive relations, even if limited and on a confidential basis, do exist today between Jews, Maghrebins, Arabs and Muslims of Belgium. There are both public initiatives and more discreet meetings, set up by a number of different organisations.

Existing Partnerships

- ▶ **Centre for equal opportunities and the fight against racism (CECLR)**¹⁰
The CECLR is a public body set up under the authority of the Federal Prime Minister and the services of the Federal Minister for Social Integration. It was founded in 1993. This Centre is in charge of the applying of anti-racist laws and anti-Holocaust denial laws (voted in 1981 and 1995 respectively). Since 2003, its legal mission has been enlarged to include non-racial discrimination because of a European Directive. The CECLR regularly introduces civil actions. Several high level members of extreme-right parties have been sentenced following racist actions, as well as people guilty of antisemitic acts or having made Holocaust denial comments. Several of these actions have been introduced jointly with other organisations or associations (MRAX, Ligue des droits de l'homme, Collectif Dialogue & Partage...).

The Centre for equal opportunities also undertakes a long-term mission to increase awareness of the different populations to discrimination and stereotyping. Thus, it regularly organises campaigns and takes initiatives in favour of dialogue and mutual respect. After «9/11»,

¹⁰ www.cntr.be



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this public body was responsible for a «call for mutual respect». Signed by all the presidents of the democratic parties, it states, *«it is necessary to always differentiate between the perpetrators of terrorist acts, highly condemnable, and the national, ethnic, religious or philosophical communities»*. Further, that one must *«refuse and condemn any incrimination of a group or communities in relation to current events»*, as well as, *«reinforce our efforts for the implementation of a global plan to fight racism, xenophobia, antisemitism and all the intolerant attitudes that negate the rights of a person»*.

With the same goal in mind, the Centre and Gsara (a body for continuing education through audio-visual media) produced in 2003, produced the movie «Let's hope that we can talk» (Pourvu que l'on se parle). This small but important film publicises the fight against conflict between Jews and Moroccans and in favour of dialogue. Because *«For almost two years, violent acts have been committed against Jews or Jewish institutions. Antisemitism again freely expresses itself in our country. At the same time, Islamophobia and Arab phobia are getting stronger: essentially, since 9/11.»* Stereotypes and misinformation are being disseminated without any restraint against Maghrebins and Jews. The level of tension is very high. The two communities share some of the same characteristics and share a common history! They share more common points than they have differences! In Belgium, Jews, Maghrebins and Palestinians meet with each other and build friendships. This movie is another proof that all of this is possible; it is a teaching tool, for teachers, educators and other personnel active on the ground. It is also funny (thanks to Sam Touzani), and it is an important answer to racism and antisemitism. It is a tool»¹¹.

The CECLR has also supported the campaign of «La Paix, ça commence entre nous» (Peace starts with us) (cf. infra). During the school year of 2005-2006, the Centre was the initiator of the «Ecoles pour la Démocratie» (Schools for Democracy). This project, organised for the 60th anniversary of the liberalisation of the Nazi extermination camps was carried out over several months. Many schools (of all denominations), teachers and more than a thousand youngsters (from primary and secondary schools) participated in the «Ecoles pour la Démocratie». Visits of the Fortress of Breendonck (where political prisoners were detained in Flanders during Nazi occupation) and of Auschwitz-Birkenau were organised. Students of several schools of Belgium with pupils of Maghreb origin have participated to this project. This has contributed to the strengthening of the necessary dialogue between the two communities.

► Collectif Dialogue & Share (CD&P)¹²

The Collectif Share & Dialogue (CD&P) was founded in April 2002 because of the biased presentation of the Middle East conflict by the media. This misrepresentation resulted in putting all the blame on Israel, often because of unconscious pre-conceived antisemitic ideas.

CD&P counts amongst its members Jewish and non-Jewish intellectuals including a priest representing the Belgian Religious of the Assumption to the Vatican, a theologian of the Catholic University of Louvain-La-Neuve (UCL), a director of a catholic high school, etc. and secular members— university professors, doctors, journalists...etc. Most of them, were very shocked by the one sided representation of the Middle East conflict.

With a left wing platform centred on the Middle East conflict, CD&P unites many intellectuals and professionals, who fight against antisemitism and at the same time, tries to establish a dialogue with the Maghrebintelligentsia - some of them whom may become members of the Collectif for a time.

The Collectif D&P subscribes completely to the Universal Bill of Rights and is in favour of a secular approach to society. It declares itself to be *«Against antisemitism, against all forms of racism, against all religious fundamentalism and totalitarianism, whether right or left wing»*. Founded after 9/11 and the second Intifada, group *«intends to contribute to the construction*

¹¹ Introduction from the teaching booklet of the movie «Pourvu que l'on se parle», co-directed by the Centre for Equal Opportunities and the fight against Racism and Gsara, in 2003. This video film is still available for renting or sale at Gsara (rue du Marteau 26, 1210 Brussels, tel: 02-218.58.85, info@gsara.be, www.gsara.be).

¹² www.dialogue-partage.org



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of peace and to the establishment of a dialogue between individuals, groups, communities, populations or nations. It favours any initiative aimed at getting together people of different religious, philosophical, cultural or ethnic communities in our country, and in view of current events, especially the Jewish-Arab-Muslim dialogue»¹³.

CD&P has often initiated small sized meetings and has met with high-level political figures and media representatives – Le Soir, La Libre, Le Vif, Le Soir Magazine, Standaard, Knack, Libération, RTL and RTBF etc- to discuss the Middle East conflict, seeking a more objective approach.

In order to be heard by the Jewish community and beyond, the Collectif D&P has made several initiatives, one of which is the «food for thoughts» texts it publishes regularly in Belgian newspapers.

Sometimes, CD&P publicly speak together with figureheads from Muslim organisations, such as Ethem Kislali, vice-president of the Bureau of Belgian Muslims, Khaled Abouali, President of Jewish/Moroccan Dialogue as well as Khalil Zeguendi, animator of Al Manhar.¹⁴

The Collectif also organises public events in order to give the opportunity to participate in Jewish-Arab-Maghreb dialogue to a wide audience. For example the «Jewish/Turkish Encounters» event at the ULB, (March 2004) organised with the European Centre for the Promotion of Inter-culturality (CEPI), a Turkish organisation, in the context of the Brussels festival «Mediterranean Cinema» (December 2004). It also organised «*Cultural encounters between the Jewish and Moroccan communities of Brussels*» in partnership with the association «Jewish Moroccan Dialogue». A big debate on immigration especially impressed the participants at this event.

In between these large-scale events, CD&P offers smaller conferences and debates. In March 2006, a Moroccan speaker, author of a book on Tangier was invited and more recently, (September 2006), Albert Memmi, who defines himself as an Arab intellectual. Philosopher and French writer, born in Tunisia, he spoke about his last book «Portrait of the decolonised Arab-Muslim and some others» to a large audience composed mostly Muslims and Arab-Muslims.

The Collectif also organised a trip to Morocco during which it was warmly welcomed by the Ouezzane city authorities¹⁵ and for which it received excellent coverage in the Moroccan press.¹⁶ The Collectif has also been contacted by Belgian representatives of the third most significant Moroccan political party, le «Renouveau National des Indépendants» (The National Renewal of the Independents).

Ziani Abdelkassem, political sciences researcher at the Antwerp University and Hicham Atmani, Antwerp Base manager, have entered into fruitful debate with the Collectif and share the feeling that the Middle East conflict pollutes these relations. The Collectif was also contacted by Helima Guerra, founder of Vrouwenstem (The Voice of Women), which works, amongst other things, for the literacy of women of Arab immigrant origin.¹⁷

Since 2003, CD&P produces a weekly show on Radio Judaïca, with the main objective, to help Muslim (especially Moroccan) intelligentsia, become better known by the Jewish Radio's audience who mostly come from the Jewish community. Many Moroccans, Tunisians, Algerians, Turks, Congolese have taken this opportunity to participate in these debates and as the popularity of the show grew, coincidentally so did its Muslim.

¹³ Citations from the platform of the du Collectif Dialogue & Partage. Cf. Website : www.dialogue-partage.org/Plate-Forme.htm

¹⁴ In Le Soir dated 10 March 2004, an interview of Sara Brajbart, co-president of CD&P and of Ethem Kislali, president of the European Center for the promotion of Inter-Culturality (CEPI) and et vice-president of the Executif of Muslims of Belgium is published: «*The State does not give enough support to the dialogue between communities*». www.dialogue-partage.org/A%20BOUT%20PORTANT%2010032004.htm. In Le Soir dated 27 November 2004 : «*It is necessary to create the dialogue between our communities*», interview of Khaled Abouli, president of Judeo-Moroccan Dialogue and of Sara Brajbart. www.dialogue-partage.org/lesoir27-11-04.pdf And an interview of Khalil Zeguendi and Sara Brajbart: «*Fight the misunderstandings between the Jewish and Muslim communities*» in Le Soir dated 28 June 2006 www.dialogue-partage.org/Interview%20Sara%20Khalil%20Assabyle.htm

¹⁵ See the article of «*Regards*» (monthly newsletter of the CCLJ: «*Shalom Aleikoum*», available on www.dialogue-partage.org/23_regards_593.pdf

¹⁶ www.map.ma/fr/sections/regionales/visite_a_fes_des_mem/view

¹⁷ vrouwenstem.vzw@pandora.be



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The Collectif Dialogue & Partage is also participated in the legal action started by the Centre for Equal Opportunities and the Fight against Racism (Federal Public body working on the fight against racism and Holocaust denial) against the publishers of the Islamist website «Assabyle.com» (later called «Ribaat.org»). 5-month prison sentences were issued to the perpetrators of this Holocaust denial and incitement to antisemitism carried out, although the case has gone to appeal. This trial received a high level of press coverage. CD&P made it clear, in a joint press release with the Centre for Equal Opportunities, that this was not the trial of Islam or of Muslims.¹⁸

Furthermore, seminars were organised for more than two years by Ousia Chaït, former Director of the Beth Aviv School, under the umbrella of the Collectif. Several members of the Collectif as well as a Moroccan facilitator, a Turkish schoolteacher, an Algerian instructor and a non-Jewish professor have participated in these seminars.

This work will contribute to the methodology, being developed jointly with the IRFAM (the Institute for Research, Formation and Action on Migrations), entitled «The emotional pest – History of affective immigrations». *«Revisiting our own history – where we come from, whether a story of immigration and/or social integration, the one that we integrate or the one that we refuse – we then tend to build ourselves as autonomous beings, capable of inventing an existence for ourselves and to give a sense to our live. In order to achieve this, we have to try and really know ourselves, without shame or excessive pride. We must feel secure with our own history in order not to feel the need to stigmatise somebody else's history.*

It is this affective and interactive memory work that we wish to implement in our schools, in a nuanced and progressive manner, without resorting to slogans and without judging people who express fears or rancour. This meeting of hearts and of souls calls for a meticulous preparation and a real willingness to try. Punctual trainings, rational information and speeches will not achieve this. In order to live together and in order to communicate, it is necessary to suspend judgement and pre-judgment, and to establish a difference between what I see, what I think and what I feel. This learning process of what respect is, calls for the development of a true affective vocabulary, too often neglected by the Cartesian school universe.»¹⁹

Sadly, this project did not succeed in obtaining public funding and as a result, the team has dispersed.

► Jewish – Moroccan Dialogue

This was created for the «Cultural Jewish-Moroccan Encounters» and gave the opportunity, during these encounters, for debate between the Jewish and Moroccan communities living in Belgium. (See above).

The organisation, which was set up to create Jewish Moroccan Dialogue, wanted to make it easier for Jews and Moroccans living in Belgium to know each other. This encounter was indeed «magical» and the first Moroccan TV channel gave it a lot of publicity with a whole hour of prime time coverage.

However, pressure put on the Moroccans co-organisers of these encounters prevented them from going any further and in effective, put an end to this initiative.

► Group with No Name

This group, which chose not to have a name, which would stigmatise its strong aims, was born in the aftermath of the second Intifada. At the start, it attracted about a hundred of Maghrebin and Jewish Belgians. The vast majority of the latter came from l'Union des progressistes juifs de Belgique (Union of Progressive Jews of Belgium) (UPJB, see presentation note in C.2).

The group with no name organises private freeform discussion meetings, which aim to improve the knowledge each group has of the other, while putting aside the classic stereo-

¹⁸ www.dialogue-partage.org/Dossier%20presse.htm

¹⁹ www.dialogue-partage.org/des_histoires_affectives_des_imm.htm



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type clichés of both communities. During these encounters, deep reflection has taken place in order to understand what makes North Africans and Jews living in Belgium different, and what makes them similar to each other. Based on friendly relationships, this group has preferred discreet private meetings over big public events.

Its working mode is similar to that of a *think tank*, except that in general, it does not communicate about its work. Two of its co-founders, Rabah Kaddouri and Gérard Preszow have been interviewed by the monthly newsletter of the Brussels Centre for cultural interactions (CBAI), «Cultural Diary», in the dossier «To Reconcile : more than words», discussing views on the nature of the relations between Jews and Muslims of Belgium.²⁰

For some time now, this group has been meeting less and less often, and its membership has dwindled to a mere dozen people.

► **Movement against racism, antisemitism and xenophobia (MRAX)**²¹

The MRAX is the oldest organisation against racism in Belgium. It was founded by people who fought in the resistance during the war, and was set up by mostly Jewish founding members. After the defeat of the Nazis, Yvonne Jospa, a Romanian Jewish communist, who had arrived in Belgium during the thirties, was its most dynamic participant until her death. Many Jewish left wing militants joined MRAX, but also working class Jesuit priests as well as non-religious activists. Later on, children of Italian and Spanish immigrants also joined the anti-racism movement. They were joined by political refugees from Latin America and then, by a growing number of young Maghrebin Belgians. The current president of MRAX, Radouane Bouhlal, who studied law, is of Moroccan origins. Thérèse Mangot, until her recent death (June 2006) was the vice president, after having been president until 2004. She was of Jewish origin and was liberal and secular in outlook. She played an essential role in organising the contacts between Jews and immigrant organisations.

MRAX regularly cooperates with the UPJB or the CCLJ. After «9/11», it launched a vast campaign, «Peace starts with us»; in order to avoid inter-community tensions in Belgium and to promote dialogue and mutual respect, in schools, in immigrant neighbourhoods, in organisations... MRAX is a militant organisation where encounters between Jews (most of them from the extreme left), Arabs, Berbers and Muslims are still possible. Together, they fight against all forms of racism and fight for a multicultural and tolerant society.

► **Movement for the respect of cultures**

Recently founded, this movement has given itself the mission to facilitate the encounter of different cultural communities living in Brussels. Situated in the capital, the Movement for the respect of cultures is presided over by Samira Rahmani, a teacher of Moroccan origin. Its membership is extremely diverse. They are «old generation» Belgians next to more «recent» Belgians. A big event is organised once a year. In December 2004, a debate and a concert in the framework of a multicultural evening attracted a large audience around the theme «Brussels Plural». The evening retraced the inner road of inhabitants of Brussels who had diverse origins: from black Africa (the Brussels Secretary of State Gisèle Mandaila), from Moroccan (the comedian Sam Touzani and the singer Moustafa Largo), Jewish origins (Manuel Abramowicz, spokesperson of the Centre for Equal Opportunities) from Poland (Christine Kulakowski, Director of the Brussels Centre for intercultural actions).

► **Neither Whores nor Submissive (Ni Putes Ni Soumises) (NPNS)**²²

Founded after the march of «women against ghettos and for equality», organised in France in 2003, NPNS has evolved into a European network, with branches in Spain, Sweden and Switzerland. This network fights for a secular society based on diversity and equality and for the respect of national communities.

²⁰ «Islam phobia et anti-Semitism in (3) questions», interview of Rabah Kaddouri and Gérard Preszow, members-founders of the «Groupe sans nom», in «Agenda interculturel», monthly newsletter of the Brussels Center of intercultural actions (CBAI), n° 222, April 2004, pages 28-31.

²¹ www.mrax.be

²² www.niputesnisoumises.com



A Belgian committee was created toward the end of 2005/start of 2006. NPNS-Belgium is composed of a handful of militants from all kind of backgrounds, amongst which several Maghrebins (including the actor Sam Touzani) and some young members of the Jewish Laic Community Centre (Centre Communautaire Laïc Juif - CCLJ, see below). Their common militancy within NPNS contributes to the strengthening of inter-communities links and to the fight against racism and stereotypes. It is directed by Fatoumata Sidibe, of Mauritian origin. A journalist and painter, she has just published «An African season»²³. NPNS also contributes to «awareness days» which are organised in - and with - schools with a population of diverse cultural and ethnic origins.

Imams and Rabbis : Religious Leadership

► The Religious communities

Positive contacts exist between representatives of synagogues, mosques and churches. Unfortunately, these encounters between religious representatives often take place only after attacks on Jewish religious centres (with Molotov cocktails), and the Jewish Martyrdom Memorial (situated in one of the poorest neighbourhood of the Brussels commune of Anderlecht) or following violent attacks against young Jews in Antwerp. These kinds of incidents have been on the rise since the second Intifada. Imams have made declarations to denounce these attacks perpetrated by young Belgians of North-African origin. However, these words so far stay just as words and do not lead to regular or more in depth contacts, or to the organisation of common activities, which would achieve a better understanding of the other group.

Nevertheless, in January 2005, at the Egmont Palace of Brussels, a first time meeting took place at the initiative of «Men of Words» under the common patronage of the King of Belgium and the King of Morocco : «Rabbis and Imams for Peace». More than 150 people participated to this event, from all over the world. Amongst them, Dalil Boubakeur, the Rector of the Paris Mosque and Joseph Sitruk, former Chief Rabbi of Paris. Smaller and more confidential inter-religions encounters have taken place in other countries, with the participation of Belgian Jewish organisations. In May 2002, an encounter between Jewish messianic organisations and the Maghrebini Maritime Alpine Association took place, gathering, «Arab Maghrebins converted to the Christian God» (sic). On the Belgian side, it is the Messianic Assembly «Beth Yeshoua» (located in Brussels, Antwerp and La Louvière) that was represented.

Moreover, earlier on, in 1999, Arab musicians gave a concert on the stand of the Keren Kayemet Leisraël (KKL), during an international fair in Charleroi. The KKL had, at that time, also made contact with the Sisters of Zion.

► Note on the El Kalima Centre²⁴

Note : we believe that is useful to mention here, an experience with Muslims that is taking place in a Catholic milieu. Francis Littré, Director of a Catholic high school and member of the Collectif Dialogue & Partage, is a member of this Centre.

The Centre «El Kalima» (Speech in Arabic) was created in 1978, in the aftermath of the Vatican II Council and the Vatican's new approach to non-Christian religions. The Centre presents itself first as «an Islam-Christian Centre under the patronage of the Pères blancs in Brussels». Its director at the time was Charles Deckers, Père Blanc (White Priest) who had just came back from Algeria where he had spent 27 years, jointly with Father Jean-Marie Gérard and Sister Françoise Cassiers.

At the time, close to 150 000 Muslims, the vast majority of them, immigrants, lived in Belgium. The level of public awareness of the presence of this religion in Belgium was very

²³ Editions

²⁴ Rue du Midi, 69 - 1000 Bruxelles -Tel : 02 / 511 82 17 - Fax : 02 / 511 22 45 - E-mail : elkalima@busmail.net



low. However, Christians working with Muslims in immigrant neighbourhoods started to express their need for better information on this unknown religion. Hospital staff, teachers in Turkish or Arab neighbourhoods, and priests dealing with mixed marriages, discovered that they were not well prepared for this confrontation and they want to be better equipped to deal with this situation.

In order to answer these needs, tools were developed and activities organised. For example: information and hospitality centres; easily accessible information; libraries; dialectal and classical Arabic classes; training; creation of opportunities for interested Christians and Muslims to meet each other and obtain better knowledge of each other; creation of a reference centre for study; addressing the pastoral need to address the problems created by Islamic-Christian couples; hosting school groups and organising schools conferences...etc.

A «schools» committee was set up to establish a permanent representative body for the discussion of new questions linked to schools' evolution of schools and other burning topics. The programs are improved year on year, with the inclusion of some cultural activities (art shows, literature, music...).

Conferences where Christians and Muslims discuss their different perception on several subjects have been organised. For a few years now, these conferences have been opened to other religions and beliefs.

The specifics of the El Kalima Christian Centre for the relations with Islam, is to look at Muslims as worshipers of «God» and to place this encounter at the level of inter-religious dialogue. The dialogue with Muslims should not be improvised but should be thoroughly prepared. It should imply mutual respect and a real knowledge of Islam in all its diversity. The goal should be multiple format encounters, and should include education, simulation, collaboration, supporting reflection and action. The management of the Centre is currently under the direction of a Dominican Sister (Marianne Goffoël).

The El Kalima Centre hosts the C.I.R.I., the Inter-diocesan Committee for relations with Islam. The C.I.R.I. is an inter-diocesan body devoted to the debate of questions linked to relations with Islam: mixed marriages, conversions, training of those involved in pastoral care, teaching, and identity of Catholic movements, news events, and relations with the new representative body of Belgian Muslims. On the Dutch speaking side, the same mission is assured by the ROMC (Relatie Opbouw Moslims Christenen) within the KMS (Kerkwerk Multicultureel Samenleven).

However, currently, the relations with the Muslim community are difficult.

Peace Organisations

- ▶ Several Israeli pacifist movements have followers in Belgium, most of them Jewish. For example, the organisation «The Belgian Friends of Shalom Archave», controlled by the CCLJ.

More recently, there has also been the creation of a Dor HaShalom (Peace Generation) set up by former madrikhim (youth counsellors) of the Hachomer Hatzair of Belgium and by youngsters of the Union of Progressive Belgian Jews (UPJB). The UPJB is, for the most part, in contact with the Israeli peace movement Gush Shalom.

These organisations try, through their activities, to fight against the frequent generalisations made between Jews and Israel. They organise conferences to which Palestinian and Arab speakers come to express their views - for example Leila Shahid, the delegate of Palestine in Belgium and to the European Community.



Cultural Actors and Events

- ▶ The Jewish-Moroccan relations also develop, in a less obvious but significant way, through cultural events. Concerts, art shows and plays constitute opportunities for fruitful meetings.

For example, in 1999, during the «Grandes Nuits du Ramadan» (Big Nights of Ramadan) which took place at the Berber New Year, at the Flemish Theatre of Brussels, the Jewish-French-Algerian singer Lili Boniche (78 years old) gave an unforgettable performance. In front of a large and enthusiastic Maghrebin, Turkish, Jewish and Belgian (Flemish, Walloons and from Brussels) audience...she performed her music, in which Jewish-Sephardic, Arab and Andalusia melodies coexist. The concerts of Lili Boniche constitute a magnificent tool for promoting friendship between nations. This is also the case of the work of the comedian and director Sam Touzani. He is the main character of «*Pourvu que l'on se parle*», the documentation movie produced in 2003 by the «Centre for equal opportunities and the fight against racism» and Gsara, on the common characteristics of the Jewish and Maghrebin immigration (see above). Sam Touzani presents himself both in front of North-African associations and Jewish associations. Sam Touzani is very close, at the professional and personal level, to the humorist Richard Ruben, a Belgian Jew of Egyptian origin. The Moroccan Brussels singer Moustafa Largo is another key figure for the development of musical links, between the North-African and Jewish communities in Belgium. Sam Touzani, Richard Ruben, Moustafa Largo and others, have systematically, through their art and public statements, denounced racism toward Maghrebins as well as antisemitism. In their way, they are the symbol of mutual respect and have become the spokespersons for living well together.

Some Belgian theatres also support these pacifist ideals in order to consolidate good relations between the communities by programming plays targeted for that purpose. This is the case of the Theatre Le Public, situated in a poor neighbourhood of Brussels, in which mainly Turkish, Kurd, Aramaic, Armenian and Moroccan populations live. During the season 2006-2007, they have shown the play «*Monsieur Ibrahim et les fleurs du Coran*» («*Mr Abraham and the Flowers of the Koran*»). Written by Eric-Emmanuel Schmitt, this play revisits the friendship between a Jewish child and an Arab-owner - or so everyone believes, of the local grocery. Though Muslim, he is actually Turkish and will teach tolerance to his young friend.

In October 2005, during the «Festival Voix de Femmes» (Voice of Women festival, Brussels), several artists performed in order to give a voice to friendship between the populations. For example the Israeli author, and singer-songwriter Sara Alexander, who has been actively involved in Jewish Arab dialogue for many years. Furthermore, she is considered as a «*major figurehead of modern oriental music*».²⁵

In Antwerp, the Inter-Religion Dialogue and the Vredencentrum (Peace Centre) have also created ties between members of the Jewish and North African communities. This was the case recently, when members of the Antwerp Jewish community and Collectif Dialogue & Partage were invited to the Vredencentrum, during the Mimouna, at the initiative of *Stichting Maimon*²⁶ (*Movement Maimon*) to share the meal, which breaks the fast of Ramadan, and to assist in the presentation of the book «*De Joden van Marokko, Tweeduizend jaar geschiedenis en cultuur.*» (The Jews of Morocco, two thousand years of history and culture)²⁷ by its author, Heidi Verdonck. They were also invited to participate in the debate that followed the presentation of the book. This debate, chaired by the president of the Association of Journalists, involved representatives of the Antwerp Jewish community, of Kif Kif and a teacher from a school with a large immigrant population. All the participants expressed their views freely and, in a rare occurrence for a debate of this, the Middle East conflict was not the main topic of discussion. Instead participants focused on the problems they confront in daily life.

²⁵ From the programme of the «Festival Voix de Femmes» which took place in Brussels in October 2005.

²⁶ Jewish Nederland Organisation «Cultural Patrimony Judeo-Moroccan in the Netherlands» animated by Kitty Kaspi: stichtingmaimon@msn.com

²⁷ www.moessafier.com/Boek%20P.52-72.pdfJuifs marocains



Other initiatives

- ▶ Chico Kebsi, counsellor for Promo-Basket and Promo-Jeunes, previously coach for Maccabi, and initiator of relations between the members of the two communities²⁸, should be mentioned here.

It is not possible to mention here all the worthy initiatives taking place at school level. For example, the excellent work of Sami Arbach, psychologist and sociologist of Assyrian origin, who links himself to the school of thought of Tobie Nathan and who is, supported by Isi Halberthal, échevin of Etterbeek. He has contributed to the significant decrease in school absenteeism and to the failing at the Ernest Richard School.

Jewish organisations

- ▶ **The Jewish Laic Community Centre (Centre communautaire laïc juif - CCLJ)**²⁹

The CCLJ was founded in the 1960's. It was founded by dissidents of the Belgian Communist party, following disagreements concerning Israel and from the Jewish Solidarity organisation, which in 1969, became the Union of Progressive Jews of Belgium. CCLJ is now the most powerful Jewish organisation in Belgium. This centre, developing and facilitating the non-religious Jewish movement, plays an important role. It offers multiple activities (conferences, art shows, seminars, classes, formations) concerning Jewish culture.

CCLJ, contrary to the Zionist organisations, is also very active in fields that concern all the democrats of Belgium. It is very involved in the fight against the extreme-right, in the fight against racism (which today mostly targets North-Africans), and in the fight against the negation of the Armenian and Rwandese Tutsi genocides. In 1989, the Brussels section of SOS Racism organised, with two of its directors (who happened to be members of the UPJB), friendly encounters between the Young Laic Jews (JLJ – the CCLJ youth section) and the Youth Association for of Molenbeek, exclusively attended by Maghrebins.

At the start of every school year, CCLJ organises several days for the education for tolerance, in the framework of a project supported by public authorities. Hundreds of pupils from all the Brussels schools and the Wallonian schools take part in this essential event. Young Maghrebins and Muslims, boys and girls, as well as many other pupils of foreign origin, visit the offices of this Jewish organisation in order to get to know each other better and to reinforce good multicultural relations.

- ▶ **Information and documentation Centre (CID)**³⁰

The CID is an office whose aim is to send out information and documentation about the Jewish Community of Belgium and about Israel. Maurice Konopnicki, the president of the CID is also president of the Jewish Community of the city of Charleroi. Meetings between the heads and members of the different religions movements have been organised under his patronage. Every year, CID organises for all the schools of the region, visits to churches, mosques, synagogues as well as to the CID offices with the goal to get to know each other better. For the 60th anniversary of the liberation of the extermination camps, CID and the Jewish Community of Charleroi put in place a programme of activities called: «Education for tolerance, pluralism and citizenship.» A particular focus was put on the «Drawings and poems of the children from the ghetto of *Terezin*».

Regretfully, this programme did not get the support of the Presidency of the French Community, as was requested by the organisers.

²⁸ www.promojeunes.be/

²⁹ www.cclj.be

³⁰ www.cid.be



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► **Jewish Studies Institute (I.E.J.)**³¹

The Jewish Studies Institute was created in 1970 at the Free University of Brussels (ULB), thanks to the professors and researchers at not only ULB, but also the universities of Gand and Liège. This is the only university centre that offers a teaching programme – through evening classes – exclusively centred on the study of the «*multi dimensions of the Jewish world from antiquity until today as well as the study of its different artistic, language and literature expressions.*» Every university term, the Jewish Studies Institute offers thematic classes, some of which devoted to the Jewish-Arab culture. In the 2006-2007 programme, in the framework of the option «*Medieval Judaism*», the course «*Spanish Jews between Islam and Christianity (711-1492)*» is taught. This kind of approach and transmission of knowledge is also beneficial to good relations between communities. The Jewish Studies Institute therefore constitutes an important vehicle for the maintenance of these relations.

► **Institute for the Audio-Visual Jewish Memory (IMAJ)**³²

This institute's mission is the diffusion of movies having a Jewish theme. It organises festivals and film screenings. It also looks after a film library that is open to the public. Several of the movies and audio-visual documents available in this library can serve as an illustration of the dialogue between Jewish, Arab, Maghrebin, Muslim and Palestinian communities. IMAJ also participates in initiatives where audiences from different cultural communities meet.

► **Museum of Jewish Moroccan art of Brussels**³³

In 2003, Paul Dahan, founder of the Museum of Jewish Moroccan Art presented – with the association Citizenship Plus (see below) – the show «*Jews of Morocco – 13 centuries of cohabitation between Jews and Muslims*», in the framework of a «Two Jewish Moroccan weeks» event which was very successful. (See presentation note of Citizenship plus in C.3). Their collection was also showcased in 2006 by the Jewish Museum of Belgium.

► **Jewish Museum of Belgium**³⁴

The Jewish Museum of Belgium, continuing his work to differentiate the Jews from the stereotypes disseminated by antisemitic professionals, offered an art show produced by Philippe Pierret, who is one of the Museum conservators, called «*Jewish Itineraries and Spaces: The Schoule of Molenbeek*». The show opened from October 2006 to March 2007.³⁵ Molenbeek, a poor Commune of Brussels, today has an important and lively Maghrebin-Muslim community. Many Jewish immigrants used to live there. With this reminder to the current inhabitants of Molenbeek, the organisers intend to contribute to the fight against pre-conceived ideas and to correct the lack of knowledge of history, responsible for division and conflicts between communities.

► **Jewish Social Service (SSJ)**³⁶

The Jewish Social Service was set up after World War 2 in order to help the Jewish victims of genocide (surviving deportees, hidden children and individuals, exiles and orphans). It rapidly became professional and extended its activities. Today, it has a very good reputation as a social service and it also provides help (social, psychological, medical help...) to non-Jews. Its personnel is specialised in the treatment of psychological traumas caused by war, deportation and extermination and looks after refugees from the Rwandese genocide of 1994. In the framework of its social action coordinated at the Brussels level, the SSJ also participates, with other bodies, to initiatives fighting other society issues (drugs, school absenteeism and school failing). In this framework, Belgian Muslims also receive help from the Jewish Social Service (amongst which the «*école de devoirs*» – Classes for children having problems at school.) It therefore becomes a place where good relations between communities can develop.

³¹ www.ulb.ac.be/philolo/judaism

³² www.imaj.be

³³ www.judaisme-marocain.org

³⁴ www.mjb-jmb.org/

³⁵ www.mjb-jmb.org/fr/schoule_introfr.htm

³⁶ www.guidesocial.be/service_social_juif/page.php



► **Union of Progressive (Liberal) Jews of Belgium (UPJB)**³⁷

The UPJB is the oldest Jewish organisation. Created during the Nazi occupation of Belgium, under the name of Jewish Solidarity, it changed its name several times. The founders of the CCLJ (see above) come from the UPJB, which is different from all the other Jewish organisations of Belgium. Indeed, declaring itself to be un-Zionist, the UPJB refuses the central role of Israel in Judaism and refuses the right of Israel to pretend to express the voice of all the Jews. Within the UPJB, there are therefore non-Zionist, un-Zionists, as well as anti-Zionists.

If several of its members are in favour of a bi-national state to replace the existing Jewish State, the official position of the UPJB is more realistic and defends the thesis of «two people, two States». Cultivating the cultural heritage of the Diaspora Jews, particularly that of Eastern Europe, from which most of its historical founders originate, UPJB develops an important activity in «Belgo-Belgian» and international domains. A left wing organisation, as its name indicates and its history demonstrates (historically, this structure was put together by Jews from the Belgian Communist Party), this group also includes representatives of the radical left (mostly from the Trotskyite Pos), of the socialist parties (PS and sp.a) and ecologist parties (Ecolo and Groen!). Historical supporter of Israeli-Arab and Palestinian peace, UPJB has been in contact with the Palestine Liberation Organisation from the very beginning, and because of this positioning; UPJB is marginalised within the Jewish community.

UPJB, as with CCLJ and the Collectif Dialogue & Partage, is in regular contact with Arab, Maghrebin and Muslim organisations. For that reason, it regularly organises events, debates and «parties» together with these organisations. In November 2005, the UPJB organised, with the Association of Parents of the St-Gilles Schools (See C.3), a «Judeo-Maghrebin Ball». The Moroccan-Belgian band «Maghraïba» and the band «Yiddish Tanz» provided musical content. Together, they played at other multicultural parties, mixing Jewish and Arab melodies. They have also visited schools in the Brussels commune of St-Gilles to explain the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. These presentations were made by joint «mixed Judeo-Maghrebin teams».

In addition, from the beginning until today, the UPJB-Jeunes, its youth movement, responsible for the preparing the next generation of leaders, welcomes also children and teenagers of Maghrebin origin. This mix allows for a better mutual knowledge and organises the joint fight against stereotypes and pre-conceived ideas.

Maghreb, Arab and Muslim organisations

► **Association of Parents of the St-Gilles Schools**

This association is not strictly speaking a Maghrebin organisation. However, parents of Maghrebin origin are the initiators of this association set up in the downtown part of the Brussels commune of St-Gilles, an urban and poor neighbourhood where several immigrant populations live. Since 2000, this association has been working together with the «Union des Progressistes Juifs de Belgique» (UPJB). At the initiative of the latter and with seven other organisations (MRAX, the Belgian-Palestinian Association, the Intercultural Centre for training and action, the St-Gilles Social Communal Mediation...), they meet in «joint mixed Jewish Maghreb teams», with young people from St-Gilles schools. Their goal is to explain the reasons of the origin of the Israeli-Palestinian and Arab conflict, and above all, they try to break the belief that all the Jews are assassins and all Arabs are terrorists in the making.

The Parents of the St-Gilles Schools and UPJB also organise the Jewish Maghreb festival (see UPJB note in point C2). This association, which represents whole North African families, effectively fights, through its friendly ties to the UPJB, the stereotypes held about Jews.

³⁷ www.upjb.be



► **Citizenship Plus**

This non-profit organisation promotes an active citizenship and continuation of the culture of origin of «new Belgians». Citizenship Plus has the objective of «*an open dialogue for tolerance between the different communities and generations*», as well as «*equal opportunities for men and women*». To achieve these goals, it organises «*thematic encounters for youth, especially immigrant youth*».³⁸ In January 2003, this Belgian-Moroccan association has organised jointly with the Museum of Jewish Moroccan Art of Brussels (see above), the event «*Jews from Morocco - thirteen centuries of cohabitation between Jews and Muslims*». An initiative of the utmost historical importance, it was also very positive for the advancement of friendly relations between Jews and the Moroccans of Belgium. Indeed, this event attracted many organisations and school institutions patronised by young Belgian Maghrebins. The program: a musical evening of Jude-Andalusia and Judeo-Moroccan music, and a roundtable «*Identity and Dialogue: Jews and Muslims of Europe*» where Moroccans, Belgian Moroccans, Jews and Arabs expressed their views.

► **Arab Cultural Centre (CCA)**³⁹

This body active in the French Community, mostly organises cultural activities. Clearly involved in the fight for a laic society, this centre «*is totally independent of any powers or ethnic, political or cultural representations and free from any pressure from Arab countries, practises free thinking, listens to all forms of thoughts, respects the civil rights of populations, and welcomes representatives of all rites, religions and philosophical movements*».⁴⁰

In December 2001, this centre was invited by the «*Morale Laique*» to debate, at the library of the Cultural Centre of this Brussels commune, on the following subject: «*The relations between Muslims and Jews...?*». The debate took place, but the Arab Cultural Centre, distrusts «*people of Jewish cultural origin*». In its information newsletter, dated January–February 2002, it mentioned: «*the event was rather painful for all the persons present because we could feel how much the identity problem is difficult for our western friends of Jewish religion. Our pain, the pain of people from the Arab world, our millions of deaths during the last century, our current exile, the current massacres, the ethnocide taking place right now, all of this seems to pale compared to their own experience or to the pain they feel. We got the feeling that they do not hear us. Some of them even said that we are always «complaining»; they seem to believe that we cannot be sensitive to what happened to their communities during the course of history. Despite all the above, we believe that our sincerity was perceived and accepted*».⁴¹

On its website⁴², the following can be read: «*The Zionist pretension is based on murder and theft*», and denounces the Zionist lobby, for example. «*The newspapers open their columns to you even when you forget yourself to the point that you are leaking hate, spite, two or three shovelfuls of gratuitous unkindness to the point where you are equivalent to Nazi movements*», and further «*for what concerns the life in society, Muslims and Christians both reproach Jewish groups for their manipulation of money through interest lending, to «kill» certain professions by accepting unacceptable working conditions, and above all, to always side with the strongest.*»

Despite this negative conclusion, the CCA continues its actions, notably through the promotion of Judeo-oriental music.

► **Executive of Muslims of Belgium**

This is the official representation body of the Muslims of Belgium; it is recognised as such by the public Belgian authorities and is responsible of the organisation of the Muslim religion in Belgium, where Islam is recognised as a religion since 1974. This executive body, besides its legal missions, also supports inter-religious dialogue as well the inter-community dialogue. It helps reduce tension after attacks on synagogues, for example. After the 9/11 attacks in New York, the Executive of Muslims, jointly with the Israelite Consistory of Belgium, the

³⁸ Extract from the presentation note in the program of the event «*Jews from Morocco – 13 centuries of cohabitation between Jews and Muslims*» which took place in Brussels from 8 to 22 January 2003, under the High patronage of the kings is Mohammed VI of Morocco and Albert II of Belgium.

³⁹ www.culture-arabe.irisnet.be

⁴⁰ Extract from the presentation note.

⁴¹ «*The relations between Muslims and Jews...?*», of Hawa Djabali, article in «*Bulletin du CCA*», n° January-February 2002.

⁴² www.culture-arabe.irisnet.be



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Coordination Committee of Jewish Organisations and the Centre for Equal Opportunities and the Fight against Racism, jointly organised a conference about Islamophobia and Judeophobia. However, due to a lack of funds, this conference did not take place. The Centre for Equal Opportunities nevertheless made a «*Call for mutual respect*». This symbolic text was signed in October 2001 by the presidents of the democratic political parties. This text, calls, amongst other things, for «*All the population to refuse shortcuts, the assimilation made between some populations, fundamentalisms and terrorist violence*».

It is worth mentioning that both the former vice-president and the current president, are both of Turkish origin, and have a well-meaning attitude toward Jews. The current president did not hesitate to express publicly his best wishes for Rosh Hashanah to the Jewish community of Belgium during the TV show «*Contreverses*» of in September 2006.

► **Collective for an open Islam (CIO)**

Confronted by a rising number of calls for hate, some Muslims of Belgium, have, as others, in Europe and in the Muslim world, organised themselves in order to neutralise these calls. At the end of 2005, the Collective for an open Islam was created, in that spirit. It is open to everybody, including non-Muslims. This Collective made the following statement: «*numerous Muslims, of all origins, social classes, and levels of instruction try to understand and live their religion with all the intelligence of their heart, but, either they do not express themselves publicly, or they do it in a disorderly manner; on the other hand, the fundamentalist Islam has many institutions, associations and media at his disposal and often succeeds in attracting for its own ends, the sincere beliefs of a large quantity of believers, as well as their feeling of belonging to a community. Confronted to this quasi monopoly of visibility, the moderate Islam – which we know constitutes the majority - does not possess the collective power which would make it possible to be listened to*»⁴³. This is why the Collective was created. An organisation for openness, the CIO intends to participate in inter-religious contacts and to Judeo-Maghrebin relations.

► **Wafin**

Created in 2002, around the doctorate Merouane Touali (Soufi), this website presents itself as the most frequented «*Moroccans of Belgium*» portal. It provides information on activities organised by Jewish organisations and thus allows for another image of the Jewish community within the Moroccan community, much different from the one proposed by the fundamentalist organisations. The Wafin website also publishes press releases of anti-racist organisations, for example, the Centre for equal opportunities and the fight against racism, after anti-Jewish incidents, as well as those of the CD&P. It is supported by the King Baudouin Foundation.

Conclusions

- The situation in Antwerp is not the same as the situation in Brussels. In Antwerp, the demand for relations comes more from Moroccan organisations than from Jewish ones, probably because of the hostile climate created by the Vlaams Blok / Belang (extreme-right party, founded by antisemitic neo-Nazis). In Brussels, it is the opposite situation, maybe because of the increased presence of pro-Palestinian militancy.

The Israeli-Palestinian conflict is a stumbling block, but also constitutes the meeting point between people who would otherwise have no occasion to meet each other because of extremely different socio-economic and cultural backgrounds.

Together with the «*Union des Progressistes Juifs de Belgique*», the «*Collectif Dialogue & Partage*» is the organisation that went the furthest in working with members of the Maghrebin and Arab-Muslim community.

⁴³ Extract from the foundation text of the Collective for an open Islam, summer 2006.



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CD&P is for example, the initiator of a «three way» collaboration between Haïfa, Ramallah and the city of Brussels.⁴⁴ Implemented by Yvan Mayeur, president of the CPAS of the city of Brussels, this alliance was later on taken on by the OMS which proposed it to 9 other European capitals. Nevertheless, CD&P, which offered its full support to a Palestinian Doctor who came to Belgium to continue his education, and has, for 3 years, participated in a radio show with a Belgian-Moroccan, has reached mixed conclusions after these experiences.

People of Maghreb and Arab-Muslim origin, who participate in a respectful dialogue with Jewish organisations, are considered «the henchmen of the criminal Zionists » and are stigmatised within their own community where the community withdrawal into itself is stronger and stronger.

The Maghreb, Arab and Muslims organisations cited in this document, attract a number of individuals for specific actions, but they do not have a similar influence as the corresponding Jewish organisations. This is the reason why it has proved difficult to create a structured and long-term dialogue between the two communities.

Besides, there is a real lack of objective information concerning the Middle East in general, and about Zionism, in particular.

The debates – when they take place – rarely give the floor to those representing Israel, and when it does, it is to an anti-Zionist or to someone very critical of Israel. Recently, «A week against the wall» has been organised by the Catholic University of Louvain-la-Neuve (UCL) and by Oxfam, with the exclusive participation of pro-Palestinians speakers. Benoît Bourguine, member of CD&P and theologian at the UCL, warned the authorities, and with the help of the former Rector of the UCL, Marcel Crochet, succeeded in obtaining a more balanced *modus operandi*.

However, there are also obstacles to Jewish Muslim dialogue on the side of the Jewish community where rivalries are malevolent. The community withdraws into itself and unacceptable pre-conceived Islamophobic ideas gain more and more support.

Furthermore, the political parties do not support this dialogue with any kind of goodwill. Sometimes for ideological reasons, in accordance with their doctrine, but also for electoral reasons, some parties have taken black and white positions in the Israeli Palestinian conflict. Far from encouraging inter-community dialogue, they are happy, at best, to organise bilateral relations. The support given to Palestinians excludes any support to Israelis (because «they do not need it», even though they feel isolated).

It is not in good taste today to express any sympathy for the democratic constitution of the State of Israel. Such an utterance could indeed hurt the feelings of the Maghreb and Arab Muslim electorate. Consequently, some subjects are no longer discussed in order not to be associated to «Jews» and therefore to lose votes.

For some politicians, Jewish Muslim dialogue must remain their exclusive domain and they discourage any initiative that is not under their own authority.

To give an idea of the level of the debates, let's note that Ni Putes Ni Soumises -France has invited Yvan Levaï, the Director of the Jewish Tribune⁴⁵ which would be equivalent to, in Belgium, a left wing organisation inviting the Director of Contact J ... a confrontation of point of views that never takes place in our country! The words of Voltaire «Even if I do not agree with you, I will fight so that you will have an opportunity to speak» are really not the concern of the democratic parties or of the persons who see themselves as the guardians of the freedom of speech.

⁴⁴ La Libre Belgique – April 2002

⁴⁵ www.niputesnisoumises.com/xlagenda327/index.php



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The vast majority of the immigrants from Maghreb are of rural and poor origin and do not master their own history: The Moroccans ignore the meaning and importance of the Jewish Moroccan community, which has existed there for centuries, even before the arrival of Arabs in North Africa. It is therefore urgent to help them own to their own history.

In view of this situation, decisions in order to facilitate the dialogue between the communities must be taken.

1. Brainstorming should be organised within the Jewish community and within the Muslim community in order to constitute a group composed of different people motivated to establish Jewish Muslim dialogue and supported by their entire community.
2. A geo-political seminar about the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, cornerstone of any deep relation, should be offered to any candidate to the dialogue.
3. Information sessions and visits of «neighbourhoods» where the immigrant population live should be organised in order to put an end to mutual stereotypes and pre-conceived ideas. The symbolic places of the Jewish religion, including synagogues, of which some are still located in the poor neighbourhoods of Brussels and Antwerp, should open their doors to non-Jews, as it is the case during the «Patrimony Days» at the big synagogue of Brussels or of Charleroi, at the initiative of the local Jewish community.
4. More globally, the education authorities should insert, in the schools programs, a class on the history of all immigrations including their respective contribution to Belgium. The history of Jewish immigration should be taught (how many young people from immigrant families thinking of Jews in terms of stereotypes, or even know that Jews, as they have, come from working class immigration?) Refer to the methodology developed by Ousia Chait (see page 10 of our report). In the same spirit, the exile conditions of Jews in Arab countries should also be better known.
5. The project – regrettably put aside by the Brussels public authorities for so-called budgetary reasons – to create an immigration museum (based on the New York museum) should be re-launched as early as possible. This would demonstrate the common aspects of all immigrations, in general, and of the Jews and Moroccans of Belgium, in particular.
6. A space in a neutral place, neither Jewish nor Muslim, should become a point for encounters between people of different cultural origins, around cultural events, concerts, etc.
7. The needs of the Maghrebin and Arab-Muslim community should be looked at, so that Jewish members could offer their expertise.
8. The media should multiply the space for debates between people from different origin or culture, whether during radio or TV shows or in newspapers columns. Newspapers should devote some space to the communities of our country, and let the members of these communities manage these spaces.
9. One could also imagine putting in place mutual sponsorship.
10. All the actors of the civil society, whatever their cultural, religious or ethnic background, should be mobilised for a big collective project, supported by the public authorities, for the implementation of *better living together*. For example, a big campaign with the following theme: do you have a Jewish friend, do you have a Muslim friend or do you have a Catholic friend?



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It is urgent to refocus the debate on the real problems encountered by the immigrant population, which too often concerns itself with the Middle East conflict instead of its actual problems: good schools, employment, lodgings, buying power, quality of life...etc. For example, the march against the war in Lebanon saw more than 8 000 people in the streets of Brussels, but no march of any importance has ever been organised to denounce the problems of the population of immigrant origin.

A list of people likely to participate in a roundtable for dialogue could also be established, but is the aim to create one more event or alternatively, to establish foundations for long-term dialogue between the two communities?

In any case, the public authorities should encourage and support the secular non-religious organisations that reunite Maghrebin, Arabs, Muslims, willing to start a dialogue with Jewish organisations open to such exchanges.

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- « *Los Muestros - La Voix des Sépharades* » (The voice of Sephardics) : revue of the European Sephardic Institute
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DENMARK



Introduction

Demographic Data

- ▶ Total population: 5.4 million (1 January 2006), one-third of whom resides in Greater Copenhagen
Jewish population: 6,500 (1 January 2000), the vast majority of whom live in Copenhagen

Danish Jews were granted full civil rights in 1814 (the first Jewish resident in Denmark, Joachim Jew, was registered in 1592 in the northern town of Helsingør). However, the Danish State had gone bankrupt only a year earlier, in 1813, and the emancipation of Danish Jewry consequently caused many anti-Jewish riots.

At the end of the century, modern political antisemitism became more widespread. Jewish financiers played an important economic role at the time, and were subject to harsh accusations, especially during and after World War I. Most of them, however, lost their money and their influence in the post-war recession of 1921-4. Subsequently, antisemitism played only a much more peripheral role in public debate.

Like most other western countries, Denmark permitted few German Jews to settle in the country from 1933 onwards, although some young German Jews were admitted to study agriculture (and subsequently make their way to Palestine). Some of them were still in the country when Denmark was occupied by Nazi Germany on 9 April 1940. Previously, the Danish government had opted for collaboration with the Germans in the hope that they would thereby protect the country and its citizens, the so-called «policy of negotiation».

Denmark has become famous for the October 1943 rescue operation in which more than 90 per cent of the Jewish population in Denmark crossed the sea to reach neutral Sweden. Only some 500 Danish Jews were seized by the Germans and deported, mostly to Theresienstadt. Denmark has ever since been seen as a shining example of a country that protected its Jewish population during the war. Denmark was liberated on 5 May 1945, which remains a national day of commemoration.

(Institute for Jewish Policy Research and American Jewish Committee)

Jewish community in Denmark

- ▶ Despite the fact that the Danish economy is sound and the unemployment rate has decreased, there is an upsurge of activity from extreme right-wing groups, and xenophobic notions have become more commonplace. In Denmark, as in other European countries, there is rising concern about the intake of refugees and the extent of immigration; xenophobic attitudes - although not specifically antisemitic - are increasingly apparent in the rhetoric of even the mainstream political parties. However, there are very few serious or violent xenophobic incidents in Denmark and those more minor incidents that do occur are generally examples of discrimination.

The Jewish population in Denmark is well integrated in society, and for the most part, it enjoys equal access to social services and amenities. More visible minorities, however, have increasingly experience discrimination, particularly in regards to employment, leisure activities and police surveillance.



Muslim Community in Denmark

- ▶ Denmark does not register its citizens ethnically or religiously. Therefore, there are no official statistics detailing religious affiliation in Denmark, but looking at the immigrant and refugees groups from countries with Islam as the official religion, one can more or less estimate how many people have a Muslim origin.

According to an official report published in Sept. 2005 by the Ministry of Integration, nearly 200,000 people fall under the term «Muslim».

It is 2.7 % of the total Danish population of 5.4 million inhabitants. It is the second largest religion in Denmark.

The 10 largest Muslim communities are Turks/Kurds, Iraqis, Palestinians, Bosnians, Pakistanis, Somalis, Iranians, Afghans, Moroccans, and Syrians.

In the late 1960s and early 1970s, many Muslims came to the country as labour migrants from countries such as Turkey, Pakistan, Morocco and the former Yugoslavia, and in the 1980s-1990s, considerable groups of Muslim refugees arrived came from the Middle East, Somalia and Bosnia -Herzegovina. Muslims with a refugee background currently constitute about 40% of all Muslims in Denmark. In addition, there are thought to be nearly 5000 ethnic Danes who have converted to Islam.

Most Muslims live in and around Copenhagen and in other major cities such as Aarhus and Odense. Denmark is traditionally characterised by a high degree of ethnic and religious homogeneity and it is only as a result of immigration in the last few decades that a greater variety of cultural and religious traditions have become visible in society.

The Present Situation

Now let us look at the present situation in Denmark for these Muslim communities.

- ▶ **Political.** There are three members of the Parliament - one with Syrian, one with Pakistani and the third with Turkish roots. Over and above these three, there are nearly 25 local councillors in different cities. All of them belong to political parties, and thus they have to toe the party line. Since most of them depend on Danish votes, they do not openly identify with Islam or defend Islam in public debates.
- ▶ **Socio-economically,** most persons among Muslim communities are doing very poorly. Even if the official national un-employment rate is 4%, the figure for most Muslims groups is nearly 50%. Nearly 70% Muslim women are outside the labour market. Most jobs available to them are cleaning, services and factory jobs. The lack of financial means restricts Muslims from opening their own businesses but some communities like Pakistani, Turks and Iraqis have managed to have small family owned shops. The younger generation is doing well in education but still find it hard to get a good paying appropriate profession.

Many employers openly ask official employment exchange centres or private employment agencies not to send foreigners, meaning Muslims from third world countries. The government seldom takes any action to stop this discrimination and abuse of an individual's right to work. There has been no challenge to this kind of treatment on the grounds that employers have a right to hire whom they want. The situation is so dire that the Danish state now wants to give economic help to those employers who will hire ethnic minorities.



Denmark

According to a report in International Herald Tribune of 27 Sep 2005, 33% of foreigners in Denmark feel isolated and discriminated against. The survey was conducted by Catinet Research on behalf of the Danish Confederation of Trade Unions. Somalis feel so discriminated that they officially complained to the UN to relocate them in some other country as even cleaning jobs are refused to them. Many young persons with Muslim sounding names and good qualifications cannot even get an appointment for an interview, let alone get a job.

Graffiti with racist slogans is widespread in large towns throughout Denmark. In parks, on walls, in bus stops and other public places, one can read nasty writings. In busses, trains and other forms of public transportation, people often avoid sitting beside a person who looks like an Arab or has dark skin. People pass discriminatory remarks without anyone taking a stand against it. In shopping centres and playgrounds, Danes often show hostility to ethnic and religious minorities, or ignore them altogether.

Cultural racism against Muslim communities and Islam as a religion is manifested in newspapers, radio, and television, in churches and in literature. Even in porno magazines, and children's books one can find racist stories and remarks about Islam. The media constantly portrays Muslim cultures as inferior and primitive.

Newspapers do the same in their articles, editorials and in their letters to the editors. Media studies have shown that 70% of all media coverage of Muslims in Denmark is concerned with crime, social problems, honour killings, fundamentalism, terror, forced marriages, lack of goodwill and a hatred of the Western values, democracy and human rights.

Frequently, such coverage is not only exaggerated and distorted, but is filled with lies. It is rare that a foreigner's race, religion, culture and country of origin are not mentioned, whether or not this information is relevant. Islam is often presented as fanatical, barbarian, uncivilised, and medieval. It is often attacked with racial slurs similar to the way Jews were attacked in the 1930's.

Existing Partnerships

In Denmark, Jewish and Muslim communities have had very few contacts, let alone very visible on going co-operation projects.

Imams and Rabbis : Religious Leadership

- ▶ There have not been any direct exchanges between Muslim and Jewish religious communities. The most Imams come from home countries and Mosques are run on an ethnic basis. Turkish, Pakistani, Iranian, Moroccans, Bosnian and Middle Eastern congregations keep to themselves and often do not co-ordinate their activities. However, both Jews and Muslims did take part in a Danish initiative called Abraham's House. The result was some quality audio video material. Abrahams Hus (1998) <http://www.dkm.dk/index.php?id=42>

The recent developments of very open islamophobic statements by Danish politicians and media prejudices in the shape of insulting caricatures of Prophet Mohammed did result in better awareness among Muslim and Jewish communities for a dialogue and support. Many Jewish intellectuals publicly distanced themselves from misuse of freedom of expression and talked of religious respect.

It is our understanding that a dialogue is possible and there is goodwill on both sides.



▶ Possible Jewish contact persons

- Arne Melchoir – politician and former member of Parliament
- Bent Melchoir – former Chief Rabbi of Denmark
- Finn Rudiasky – Local politician – Copenhagen
- Jacque Blüm – Sociologist and author
- Linda Herzberg – Teacher and NGO Representative
- Miriam – Migrant - Women Advisory Service
- Jeanne Kamppinski

▶ Possible Muslim contact persons

- Aminah Tønnsen – author and lecturer
- Safet Bektovec - lecturer
- Zubair Hussain – spokesperson – Muslims in Dialogue
- Abdul Wahid Pedersen - Imam
- Shireen Kankan - spokesperson – Critical Muslims
- Hadi Khan – Engineer –
- Mona Shiekh – Student – member Humanistic Forum
- Asma Abdol Hameed – Student and TV presenter
- Dorte Rasmusen
- Anne Steffensen
- Bashir Nazmi – Pakistani TV Link
- Ali Nicilaisen – Student
- Raja Afzal – Radio host
- Bashy Quraishy

▶ Bashy Quraishy

▶ Linda Herzberg

Academics and Intellectuals

▶ Educational

There is co-operation between Jewish, Muslim and Christian lecturers to go together to different schools and talk about their religions and how they are treated in the society. There are 15 persons are involved in this project.

DIN TRO - MIN TRO - projektet (2005 f.) The project is called «Your faith –My faith».
www.religionsmoede.dk/index.php?indl_id=2115&id=6564

Community Grassroots

▶ Political level

On a political level, there have been contacts between politicians with Jewish background since the 80s. Arne Melchoir often defended minorities, especially with Muslim backgrounds, in the political arena, discussions in the Parliament on Halal food, boy's circumcision, etc.

▶ Social Activities

There was a joint project in 1998, where Radio Shalom and Ethnic Debate Forum made a series of Radio Programmes informing each other about the Jewish and Muslim Cultures, human rights and Jewish Muslim Dialogue. The project was in connection with the 50th anniversary of the Human Rights Declaration.



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The project also had a very successful Conference in the Danish Parliament on 22 March 1998 where nearly 300 people took part. The panellists had both Jewish and Muslim background.

The questions asked were many :

- How Islam and Judaism relate to terms such as dialogue and human rights?
- Is it realistic that we can create human rights which are agreeable to all cultures and traditions as well as all religions?
- Is a dialogue between Muslims and Jews in Denmark possible or the differences too great to bridge?
- The conference was a great success and a book was published which included all the panel contributions and answers to the questions posed by many delegates.

Jøde & Muslim. Dialog & Menneskeret (1998) <http://hjem.get2net.dk/cfr/dialog.htm>

Youth and Students

▶ Sports

There is no known activity in sports outside normal school activities, where both Jewish and Muslim students take part or exchange visits.

Post-Conference Addendum

- ▶ Since the European Conference of Jewish Muslim Dialogue in April 2007 a new group, the Jewish Muslim Co-operation Forum Denmark, is being formed. This group has plans to carry out the following range of activities through contact with Jewish Muslim organisers:
 - A football match.
 - A debate in the university.
 - A visit to a Mosque and synagogue.
 - A monthly information's meeting or workshop in World Cultural House Copenhagen with lectures about the history of Islam and Judaism, cultural developments and what are the basic tenants of both faiths.
 - School visits which are already taking place in Nørrebro (A neighbourhood of Central Copenhagen where 19% population has a minority background) can be extended to other areas.
 - A visit to Jewish Museum, David's Islamic Art collection and other places of interest.
 - Collection of terminology/prejudices used in the society about Jewish and Muslim people with our own explanations and corrections.



FRANCE



Introduction

► Definition

As a result of the principle of secularity as well as the law of 1905 establishing the separation of Church and State, in France there is now a distinction between the domain of politics and the domain of religion. This means that one can study the similarities and differences of various religious manifestations in order to understand the overall mechanisms. This is also a way to go beyond the narrow historical framework of a specific religion within secular multicultural societies where it is presumed that all religions have the same status with regard to the State (and the law).

Muslim Community of France

- Islam is the second largest religion in France. In 2003, it was estimated that there were 3-4 million Muslims living in France⁴⁶: more than 35% come from Algeria, 25% from Morocco and 10% from Tunisia (all 3 are former French colonies). It is estimated that between 30 000 and 50 000 French people are converts to Islam.

The Muslim presence in France goes back to the 1830s, following the colonisation of Algeria. Another important period of immigration began in the 1950s, with the need for labour for the reconstruction of a war-ravaged France. In the sixties, this immigration increased with the end of the war in Algeria. These new immigrants coming from Algeria and the other former North African protectorates or colonies were mostly men. There is a strong link between the Muslim community in France and their country of origin. In addition to these economic immigrants, in 1961-2, came 91 000 pro-French Muslim refugees from Algeria. These were mostly «harkis» as well as other Muslims from Algeria who chose to remain French, particularly career military men.

The Muslim population in France is now estimated by the Department of the Interior to be between 5 and 6 million out of a metropolitan population of about 63 million inhabitants. 1.5 million of these Muslims are thought to have French citizenship. This, however, is only an estimate as census taking based on religious adherence has been prohibited by French law since 1872.

The birth rate of this community is higher than the rest of the population, although it is slowing down. The home secretary at the time, Nicolas Sarkozy (now the French President), created in 2002 the National Council of the Muslim Religion (*le Conseil national du culte musulman*). This association, although formally recognized by the government, is, however, a non-profit organisation without a specific legal status. In 2004, this association was led by Dalil Boubakeur, rector of the Paris Mosque.

There are 1535 mosques in France, most of them in modest garages or rooms. Only a dozen of these mosques have been built for this function (30 more are now under construction). The only French Muslim school is on the Island of Réunion and the only Muslim secondary school opened its doors to 11 students in 2001, in Aubervilliers, a suburb of Paris. The construction of two other schools was planned for 2003.

In France, the Muslim community is highly concentrated in certain, often disadvantaged, areas particularly in large urban zones such as Lyon, Marseille, Paris or Strasbourg. There is talk of ghettos. For example, the Department of Seine St. Denis in the Parisian suburbs has a large Muslim population (one third of the population) as well as a high unemployment rate (30% in the town of La Courneuve).

⁴⁶ All these statistics must be considered with precaution, given that the Computer and Freedom Law of 1978 prohibits any enumeration in official inquiries concerning ethnic or religious membership. In these estimations, the term «Muslim» is thus taken in its widest sense (religion, culture, identity) [1]. These evaluations are often made by directly taking into account the origin of the immigrant populations.



In proportion to the population of the country, the Muslim community is considerably under represented in politics (politicians, high-level civil servants), television (television personalities, journalists), cinema...

Jewish Community of France

- ▶ The Jewish presence in France dates back to antiquity. Jewish tradesmen frequenting the port of Marseille from the time of the Roman colonization are at the origin of the communities of Provence and of Comtat Venaissin. During the Middle Ages, numerous and well integrated Jewish communities developed, evidence of which can be seen in the street names of many French cities, such as «Street of the Jews» or «Jewry» Street. The oldest Jewish monument still standing in France is in Rouen and dates from the 12th century.

Important in number, these communities are also important in their intellectual influence on the Jewish world. The famous commentator Rashi was native to Troyes, where he was a wine grower. The philosopher Moses of Narbonne is another notable figure of this period.

However, the Jews were not always so well tolerated. The response to hostile writings of the Church was often persecution and violence, particularly after the Crusades. King Louis IX («Saint Louis») forced the Jews to wear a distinctive mark : the «rouelle,» a small circle of yellow material, which they were obliged to wear on all garments. In 1244, following a veritable lawsuit, the Talmud was condemned to be burned in public. These diverse measures culminated in 1394 with the eviction of Jews from the Kingdom of France. Only the communities of Avignon and Comtat Venaissin, which were under the direct authority of the Pope, survived as well as those of Alsace and Lorraine, which belonged to the Holy Roman Empire.

During the 17th and 18th centuries, the communities of Bordeaux and of the south-west France took in the Portuguese Jews, who had officially converted to Catholicism to escape the Inquisition, but who nevertheless had difficulty avoiding persecution by the Inquisition in their native country.

The French Revolution marks a major transformation of the situation of the Jews in France : as of 1790, principally thanks to Abbot Gregory, they became full French citizens.

Emperor Napoleon I took diverse measures to integrate the Jews more fully into the national community, or said in other words to «normalize» them with regard to the majority. In 1808, he forced the Jews to take a surname. (The Decree of Bayonne).

The 19th Century was characterized by ever-increasing integration, even assimilation, of the Jews into French society, to which they were proud to belong. Support for the Republic and for new ideas went hand in hand with economic and social success in every domain, now that the restrictions of the old regime had disappeared. Little by little, they found their place in the army, education, politics.... They were accepted into the «world» and into social life with its rules, so important at that time.

For Jews all over Europe, France established a model for emancipation compatible with national ideals. A growing flux of immigrants coming from the east, from Germany, Poland and Russia was the consequence of this attraction. We must also include the influx of Jews from Alsace-Lorraine with the annexation of these provinces by Germany after the war of 1870.



However, old hatreds die hard. To the traditional anti-Jewish sentiment of the Church and the reflexes of rejection that made the social evolution described above, in spite of everything, slow and difficult, was added an antisemitism that denounced even well integrated Jews – especially well integrated Jews. They were assimilated with an occult force, linked to freemasonry, another target onto which were projected the fears and anxiety when faced with the society's evolution.

For the Jews – sorry, the «French people belonging to the Israelite religion» – which had made this ideal of a harmonious integration their own, the surge of antisemitism that accompanied the Dreyfus Affair was a shock that was as brutal as it was unexpected. However, it was not sufficient to bring into question this attachment. The Jews enlisted in the war of 1914-1918 as enthusiastically as their compatriots, and France continued, more than ever, to exert an attraction for persecuted Jews of Russia, Poland and the new totalitarian regimes of Eastern Europe and the soon to be Hitlerian Germany.

With the defeat of 1940 and the implementation of the Vichy regime, a black period began. From 1941, with the implementation of the «General Commission on the Jewish Question» and the adoption of racial discrimination laws, the French State cooperated completely with the German demands: The wearing of the yellow star, exclusion from schools and professions, despoilment, were the first steps in a process that was to lead to active collaboration with the Nazi policy of deportation. Each one of these steps was first applied to foreign Jews (hence the sadly well-known arrest by the French Police of Jewish families, who were then deported, know as the «rafle du Vel'd'Hiv» (the great round up of the Vel'd'Hiv, or the winter velodrome)). This policy was then extended indiscriminately to recently naturalized Jews and then to perfectly well integrated Israelites who continued to refuse to imagine that France would reject them.

Contrary to other countries, France did offer Jews certain possibilities to escape from the worst: the existence for a time of the «free zone» and the exodus of numerous French people at the time of the German invasion, real solidarity on the part of non-Jews, allowing numerous Jews to hide and to live through the war in safety. Although the proportion of deportees is smaller than elsewhere, nevertheless many people disappeared in the death camps.

At present, the Jewish community is one of the smallest of France with 1 % of the population or 620 000 people.

Existing Partnerships

Imams and Rabbis : Religious Partnerships

► Community institutions get organized

Under the aegis of the Conseil Français du Culte Musulman (CFCM), the Consistory and the Mosque of Paris and in accordance with the desires of some of the Jewish and Muslim national religious authorities, intellectuals, imams and rabbis, an association called the «French Judeo-Muslim Friendship» was created in 2004. The pilot committee consisted of twelve people: six Muslims and six Jews. The main objectives of the association are to fight antisemitism and islamophobia, to teach the respective values of Judaism and Islam, and to present the literary, poetic and artistic work of both communities during the fifteen centuries of their common life. The opening session, held on November 21st, in the presence of almost one thousand people including: Simone Veil, president of the Foundation for the Memory of the Shoah; Dalil Boubakeur, vice-chancellor of the Great Mosque of Paris; Roger Cukierman, president of the Representative Council of French Jewish Organizations



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France

France - CRIF; Moses Cohen, president of the Jewish Consistory of Paris; Salah Stétié, joint president of honour of the symposium, and the heads of various other organisations. The programme of the opening celebration had three parts: a discussion plenary; a series of exhibits of current images of Jewish and Muslim life, and finally, a concert featuring Jewish and Muslim artists.

► **Promotion of the dialogue between Jews and Muslims at the local level**

The rabbi of Ris Orangis, Michel Serfaty, organized a friendship tour of France, in cooperation with the association, the French Judeo-Muslim Friendship. Accompanied by the leaders of religious schools, young French Jews and Muslims travelled together in the same bus visiting more than 40 French cities. Numerous meetings were held in city halls, prefectures, regional councils and conferences in public places and in sensitive districts. These were aimed at engaging a dialogue between Jews and Muslims to achieve a better knowledge of Jewish and Muslim communities, their respective ways of life and concerns, and at creating bridges between both communities through the promotion of their common elements.

Academics, Intellectuals and Artists

► **For a dialogue of memories**

The Foundation for the Memory of the Shoah, mainly dedicated to financing the Memorial of the Shoah, has widened its support for initiatives of dialogue and reconciliation: dialogue of memories, inter-religious and inter-cultural dialogue. The Foundation has thus committed itself to supporting dialogue in all its forms. It took part in financing the journey to Auschwitz by Jews and Arabs from Israel, France, and Belgium, organized by Father Emile Shoufani. Together, emotions were shared in sincere fraternity at the place of horror. In 2004, the conference «Building Together the French Judeo-Muslim Friendship,» was also supported by the «Jewish Culture» Commission of the Foundation.

► **Meetings of inter-religious groups**

The French section of the World Conference of Religions for Peace – WCRP organizes an annual meeting of inter-religious groups that are members or sympathizers.

The number of local groups today is some 10 affiliated groups, 9 sympathizers, and 3 groups in the process of formation. Several new contacts were established during the meeting.

For some, the activities are limited to meetings, exchanges and common prayers; for others, they also offer opportunities for declarations and public events, training in inter-religious dialogue and for seminars on the questions of islamophobia and antisemitism

This year again, about forty people participated in a meeting intended to present the activities and interesting projects of every represented group and to express their expectations with regards to the WCRP. Mr. Jehangir Sarosh, president of WCRP Europe, enriched the exchanges notably by announcing useful steps to gain the support of institutions.

Gathering opinions brought into focus a widely shared concern on training related to religious facts: Worth mentioning:

- Aspirations and intentions born with the «Régis Debray Report», completed in February 2002, and made at the request of Jack Lang, then Minister of Education, suggesting trainings in religious information within the University Institute of Teacher Education. These hopes have nevertheless been reduced to almost nothing since the law of March 2004, banning the wearing of religious symbols.



- Testimony of an inter-religious group that was requested to give information on religions to secondary school pupils and their parents. The project concerned the 3 Abrahamic religions and was supported by the municipality and the school inspectorate.
- Possible areas of reflection proposed based on the experiences of other European countries:
 - Celebration of religious festivals within the school,
 - Presentations on the religions,
 - Proposal by the religious communities of a teaching programme on the presentation of their religion,
 - Participation of inter-religious groups at the commissions in charge of these activities,
 - Need for placing religious fact within its cultural context.

Grassroots Community

► A radio programme

The programme «Meeting: Meeting with the Muslim world», scheduled on the Jewish radio station «Jewish FM» is produced by Jean Corcos. It is broadcast every second Sunday at 9:30 in the morning; it lasts half an hour.

«Meeting» began to be programmed in May 1997; in the beginning its principal aim was to promote the Jewish Muslim dialogue. The following principles inspired and continue to inspire the creators of the programme with the full support of the radio station's directors:

- a desire to remind the Jewish, Muslim or other listeners of the common elements of our cultures and our religions;
- clear support for the solution «two states for two peoples» to bring an end to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict;
- continuous promotion of exchange and all forms of cooperation; denunciation of all forms of fanaticism and fundamentalism which shuts away each party into a demonic image of «the other»;
- the desire to share our experiences and to support the integration of Muslims in France, within the framework of an «Etat de droit», a state ruled by law;
- the common denunciation of all forms of racism.

The subjects as well as the guests are quite varied:

- The religions in front of fundamentalisms,
- The image of immigration in France,
- The past of a discord, Jews and Arabs of the 7th century in our days,
- Humour and Jewish-Arabic wisdom etc.

The guests are of origin or nationality of Morocco, Tunisia, Egypt, Israel, Turkey, Iran, Mauritania, Senegal and Burkina Faso. For some of the programme, the Muslim guest dialogues with a Jewish guest who has a domain of activity, a competence or a similar origin (writer, journalist, responsible for association, artist, etc.); in some cases the Jewish-Muslim dialogue is evoked through the interview of a single guest.

Despite the return to violence in the Middle East, the programme has continued to be broadcast since the fall of 2000, being the only FM radio «bridge» where dozens of Muslims, democrats and partisans of the Peace Process, have been able to express themselves freely. Conscious that the inter-community prism was becoming too narrow with regard to the stakes, also conscious that History had completely change since the attacks of September 11, 2001, the programme «Meeting» also turned its focus to a wider understanding of the Muslim world, this world so vast, so diverse and so poorly known. Listeners have thus been able to benefit from the knowledge of a number of journalists and international experts about Islam, the Arab world or a particular country, and from many different angles, political, religious, historical and societal.



Initiatives and Good Practices

Imams and Rabbis : Religious Partnerships

► **A journey to Auschwitz**

Monday May 26th, 2003, 6 am. The Roissy Charles de Gaulle airport. Departure for Poland. At the instigation of Émile Shoufani, the priest of Nazareth, a group of participants prepares to visit two of the concentration camps : Auschwitz and Birkenau. An initiative whose aim is to recall the black period of the Second World War, as well as the Shoah. Emile Shoufani is convinced that the understanding of the «other» is the only path to peace.

The 500 people on this journey come from France, Switzerland, Holland, even Israel ... from all over Europe.

This initiative is the first of its kind, bringing together religious heads of all confessions, as well as leaders of various organisations and artists. Father Emile Shoufani was supported by various personalities such as Father Delors, priest in the diocese of Lyon, Tarequ Oubrou, rector of the Bordeaux Mosque, Sheik Mamadou, Imam of the Taverny Mosque, head of the Imams of France and member of the French Council of the Muslim Religion, Daniel Ferrathi, a rabbi in Paris, the publisher Albin Michel, and many others as well. Father Emile Shoufani, by proposing a visit about history, wanted to bring together Arabs and Jews with the goal of approaching together the question of the Shoah. It was a great success.

Upon arrival in Krakow, the first visit was to a Jewish temple. The welcoming speech was given by Father Emile Shoufani. The visitors, Jews, Muslims and Christians held a meeting together at this first site. They shared their feelings. Jonathan, a young Israelite from the association Israelite Scouts of France tells of his impressions, «It is a very moving day, to see gathered together in this temple Arabs and Jews, that shows that people want peace.» The speech given by Father Shoufani was translated into Arabic, Hebrew and French.

During these four days, emotions ran high. The visit to Auschwitz and Birkenau made a strong impression on those for whom it was their first time. Kheira, 24, a Muslim woman coming from France, shocked by what she had seen, confessed that she was devastated, «I hope that this humanitarian catastrophe will never happen again. The initiative of Emile Shoufani is a positive thing.» Monique, 67, retired, also coming from France, Jewish, compared the moment to an opening towards the door to peace, «It is a glimmer of hope, a light in the night.»

The visit included the buildings where the atrocities had been committed, the crematoriums (destroyed during the war) and the gas chambers. Survivors of the deportation, invited especially for the occasion, spoke of their experience in the concentration camps. Schlomo, the only survivor to have worked in the gas chambers, and several others recounted their stories.

The end of the trip was marked by a commemoration to the memory of the dead. A group made up of Arabs, Jews, cited the names of the deportees that died in the concentration camps. «Never again,» was the message that all wished to communicate.

Ibrahim, an Israeli Arab of Palestinian origin, 48, Muslim, expressed his wish to see peace again in his country, «The Jews and the Arabs can live together in peace and this encounter demonstrates that it can happen.»



Academics, Intellectuals and Artists

► Teaching «religious fact» at school

Esther Benbassa and Jean-Christophe Attias, directors of studies at the Practical School for Higher Education, undertook to teach «religious facts» at schools and in institutions, for the Jewish Muslim dialogue.

They decided that learning about religious facts, promoting this knowledge, and creating conditions for a renewed dialogue would come about by inviting Jews, Arabs (Christians and Muslims) and certain others, known to be specialists in this field to train secondary school teachers in the long history and in the contemporary interests involved in Jewish-Muslim relations.

The aggravation of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, the attacks of September 11th and other terrorist events, their projection onto the national scene, have poisoned the atmosphere in the schools and housing projects. Attacks and tensions cause mistrust and fear. The teachers can feel disempowered in such a context. Prejudice, ideology and simplification threaten to distort their responses. This training was created at the request of Régis Debray, president of the European Institute of the Science of Religion, and with the collaboration of the ministry.

► Workshops for secondary school students

Workshops remind the students of the link between the Jewish and Arab cultures. Since 2004, in response to a blaze of antisemitism, the Museum of Jewish Art and History and the Institute of the Arab World have joined together to fight ignorance using play. Built around games of the «Trivial Pursuit» genre, the teaching workshop, which mixes history and symbols common to Jews and Muslims (like the five-pointed star), is a real success with the pupils and their teachers. Who can distinguish the Cordoba Mosque from the Toledo Synagogue, both of which were constructed by Arabs? Who amongst the students knows that Moses and Moussa designate the same prophet? That Arabic and Hebrew are both Semitic languages with no written vowels? But what struck Abdellah, was the Arabo-Andalousian music ending the workshop, and the song interpreted by Cheb Mami and Enrico Macias.

The workshop ends by the making of a «khamsa». This good luck charm in the form of a hand found in the Islamic, Jewish and Berber civilisations; a moment eagerly awaited by the students, who write on this talisman, according to their imagination, symbols that are important to them: first names in Arabic or Hebrew and images of peace sometimes resembling the rose window of a cathedral, but also «Go OM!» and the jersey numbers of football players.

In 2004, the Park de la Villette in Paris, which organized a successful exhibition entitled «Muslim women, Muslim men», had the idea to contact the Museum of Jewish Art and History (MAHJ) with the aim of organizing common workshops. The Ministry of Education jumped on the opportunity and supported the collaboration between the MAHJ and the Institute of the Arabic World (IMA) making this workshop an annual event in which more than seventy classes participated during the 2005-2006 school year.

► A book of sincere dialogue

This book was born from an encounter between Olivia and Kenza, the one a Jew, the other a Muslim and a common desire to discover all that draws them together: their values, their hopes, their struggles in the face of religions that are not evolving, their place as French women within their families and within their ancestral traditions and their culture. They were also obliged to envisage that which divided them: sometimes their ignorance of the other, intolerance, their vision of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Each one retracing her path



since she was a child, one in Baghdad in a middle-eastern family the other in Paris in a western middle class milieu, they exchange and compare their experiences and their questions. Thus, progressively, they approach every subject without taboo : the place of women in religion, wearing the veil and secularism, «nationalism» of their community, integration in the suburbs, racism and antisemitism of course... With a frankness that overturns the politically correct, they offer here that which is desperately needed in the public debate : a real confrontation of ideas, courageously denouncing the reality of an inter-community dis-ease with in the French society.

► **Maalouf Recital**

The term «Maalouf» refers to classical Algerian music principally from Constantine, and means «in the way of tradition». This musical specialty is the result of a thousand years of history and of the great strength of the local customs. As it is performed today, Maalouf transmits, for those who know how to listen to it, two essential themes. The first is an intense «emotion-pain». The second gives the immediate impression that this music is the living result of two paths, two different but intertwined ways of life, the sacred and the profane.

To show these two aspects of the Jewish-Arab-Muslim culture, it seemed necessary to the organizers to honour in November 2003 the two major figures of Maalouf, Sheik Ahmed Bestandji and his disciple and Jewish successor, Sheik Raymond Leyris.

The life of these two artists was dual and often ambivalent. Master secular musician of foundouq in his youth, sid Ahmed Bestandji then broke his musical journey in the twenties, to dedicate himself to a more intense spiritual life. He became Moqadem (leader of brotherhood) of Hansalta, the most important brotherhood of that time. Within this institution, he renewed the whole of the Maalouf repertoire. Sheik Raymond, disciple of Sheik Ahmed, assured the continuity of the secular expression of Maalouf. Even if he had no official rabbinic function within his community, he benefited from an almost religious respect, a man of faith and conviction, as his friends, both Jewish and Muslim, liked to say.

In addition to his spiritual charisma, Sheik Raymond made the link between Muslim and Jewish communities a major objective of his music and his art. His orchestra, made up of the best Jewish and Muslim musicians, was the best representation of a common life. However, against the background of the violence of the war in Algeria, history decided otherwise, and Sheik Raymond was finally assassinated.

► **Theatre for Peace**

In August 2006, the municipalities of Bénouville and Lion-sur-Mer, and the Ligue de l'enseignement du Calvados, organised an exchange, financed by the European Youth Programme, between French, German, Palestinian and Israeli young people on the subject of theatre for Peace.

The participants came from the Al Arroub camp in Palestine, from Dachau in Germany, from West Jerusalem in Israel and from Bénouville and Lion-sur-Mer in France. They were all aged between 16 and 20, liked theatre and wanted to meet young people from other cultures, and other religions. The exchange took place during the war in Lebanon which considerably deepened the level of exchange between the young people.

It was also necessary to create the conditions allowing, during these days spent together, the beliefs of each group to be respected.



Youth and Students

► **Confronting violence and promoting a shared safety**

The association «Religions for Peace» and «21st Century» organised an inter-religious meeting of young people from Eastern Europe that was held in Bakuriani (Georgia) in April 2006.

After having discussed questions relating to violence and shared safety, the representatives of the Jewish, Muslim and Christian youth organizations decide to take a more active part in the inter-religious dialogue, and to create an inter-religious network of young people from Central and Eastern Europe.

The members of this network must be young people, either secular or religious, with goals similar to those of the network. They have decided to work with other regional and inter-religious networks.

Beyond the principal questions treated by the network, they stress prevention, solutions to and transformation of conflicts, as well as peace and non-violence, spirituality, cultural diversity, human solidarity and charity, the relations between men and women...

They wish to cover these subjects through seminars, workshops, conferences, exchange programmes, sharing good practices, training courses, study camps, pilgrimages, common celebrations, publications, books, as well as a website to more effectively make known the results of their studies.

► **Dialogue for peace at Bondy College**

At the request of teachers at the Jean Renoir de Bondy secondary school a meeting took place at the end of January in order for the students to meet a delegation of two Israelis (Menahen Klein, Mossy Raz) and three Palestinians (Jamal Zakout, Saman Houry, Daouad Barakat). They came to present the text of the Pact of Geneva and then they developed the idea of peace and of mutual recognition between the two peoples at war. The students decided to write and to publish a petition supporting the Geneva initiative.

The professors wanted to host the delegation so that they could explain what was at stake in the Pact and the absolute necessity for a peaceful resolution of this conflict for the two peoples.

Journalists were present as well as one hundred and fifty to two hundred pupils and professors listening attentively. Afterwards, questions were asked for an hour and a half. The negotiators answered seriously and underlined the quality and the pertinence of the ideas of the young people. As they asked their questions, the students demonstrated open-mindedness and maturity: how would the Israeli and Palestinian citizens be informed of this initiative which came out of the civil society, how would a new impasse in negotiations be dealt with, how can one continue to believe when the last days have again been bloody?

Since that day, the thinking has evolved. Certain students even remained after the conference to discuss further with the negotiators.

Since then, according to the teachers, the atmosphere has changed at the secondary school. During the meeting, the organisers were surprised by the number of pupils present as well as their propositions. A project between two secondary schools, one Israeli and the other Palestinian, was born.



Post-Conference Addendum

The following organisations are also involved in the field of Jewish Muslim Dialogue :

▶ **Muslim Brotherhood against Antisemitism**

The goal of this association is to promote brotherhood and peace between Muslims and Jews, whether they claim the Jewish religion or simply belonging to the Jewish people and more generally, the development of Muslim solidarity with regard to all human beings who «feel Jewish», whatever their reasons. The association aims to denounce and combat all new and old forms of the rejection of Jews through both anti-Judaism and antisemitism and to reaffirm that these attitudes are incompatible with Islam. They defend the existence of the State of Israel and maintain the legitimacy of Israel to insure the security of its people. They claim the same rights for the Palestinians.

▶ **Paroles de Femmes**

Promotes and defends the place and the rights of women within religious as well as civil society. Promotion of women, the mother as the symbol of peace in the Jewish Muslim dialogue and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.





THE NETHERLANDS



Introduction

- ▶ Total population : 16 million
Jewish population : 43.000 (including 8.000 Israeli)
Muslim population : 970.000 (several ethnic groups)

Dutch Jewish Community⁴⁷

- ▶ Portuguese Jews (Marranos) settled as early as 1602 in Amsterdam, Middelburg, Antwerp, Emden and Hamburg escaping the Spanish Inquisition.

The Jewish inhabitants of Amsterdam played a significant role in the Golden Age from 1615 to 1715 in the United East and West Indian Companies. The Sephardic community were joined by Ashkenazi immigrants in about 1625, coming mainly from Eastern Europe. The latter developed into the larger community. The Jewish community was (and still is) in good relationship with the House of Orange (the Dutch royal family).

Prior to 1814 the Jewish community was unwelcome in many established trades. Yiddish was spoken until 1820 after the equalisation by the French Napoleon era. Many Jews involved themselves in the emancipation of the working class (1890 – 1930). They were strongly represented in the socialist movement and the diamond workers union. The Zionist movement was a small group within the Dutch Jewish community. The Jewish community founded itself in the main cities with Amsterdam as the leading centre (70 000 out of 150 000).

When W.W.2 started there was a Jewish population of 150.000 (including 10.000 refugees from Germany). When reading the Anna Frank history one would think that the Dutch saved many Jews, but the contrary is true. Although there were many examples of non-Jews helping Jews by hiding them or by forging documents for them, the Netherlands lost over 105.000 Jews during this great disaster.

In April 2005, the Dutch Prime Minister Jan Peter Balkenende, apologized for his country's collaboration with the Nazis. The Dutch wartime government «worked on the horrible process whereby Jews were stripped of their rights,» Balkenende said before he helped mark the 60th anniversary of the liberation of the Westerbork transit camp.

After the war, a mere 20 % of the pre-war Jewish population remained with about a third of them being in mixed marriages. The population decreased further by several thousand by the mid-1950s, due to emigration, mostly to Israel, and due to a low birth rate. After the war, relations with non-Jews were friendly, and reparation payments made the Jewish community wealthy. Traditional observant Jews, however, were few and far between, and organized community membership dropped significantly due to increased assimilation.

There is also a small Moroccan Jewish community in the Netherlands. In common with other Moroccan migrants, they arrived in the 1960s and 70s.

To the present day, the number of Jews in Amsterdam remains at around 25,000 to 30,000. While the total numbers of Jews have remained constant, the level of observance has increased in recent years.

All institutions are present today including schools, synagogues, welfare and youth organisations, restaurants and food shops. The community is well embedded in the Dutch society but elements of antisemitism still exist.



Dutch Muslim Community

- ▶ The Muslim community in the Netherlands started during the mid 1960's with the arrival of immigrant workers from Turkey, Morocco, and Tunisia. Later, in the mid 1990's they were joined by Somali, Iranians and Egyptians. Most immigrant workers were expected to return to their countries after 3 years. Now the Islamic community has grown to about 970.000⁴⁸ (400.000 Turkish, 320.000 Moroccan). In all major cities one will find mosques, shops, Islamic cultural centres etc. Mainly the Moroccan, and to a lesser extent the Somali, communities undergo most difficulties in integrating.

Over the last 10 years ago the second (and 3rd) generation immigrant Islamic population either have successfully integrated into Dutch society or it does not succeed at all. (This is a particular problem for Moroccans). The main difficulties come from a sizable contingent of 3rd generation Moroccan immigrants and conflict sometimes erupts into violent situations. The Moroccan community and the municipality are working hard to solve this painful problem.

Anti-Muslim sentiment, already brewing before September 11, deepened when Muslims in the town of Ede celebrated the attacks in New York and Washington, D.C. The situation deteriorated rapidly with many people holding the prejudice that all Muslims supported the attacks. Soon afterwards, Pim Fortuyn, capitalized on those sentiments when he ran for parliament, proclaiming Islam a «backward culture,» advocating a «cold war against Islam,» and declaring that «the Netherlands is full; it is time to close our borders.»

Theo Van Gogh's murder is often referred to as the September 11 of the Netherlands, but in some ways, its effects on Dutch society have been far more profound. November 2 2004 divided the country, literally setting neighbour against neighbour. White extremists set fire to Muslim schools and Mosques, and the press became biased against the Muslim community. Meanwhile Muslim extremists chanted their support for van Gogh's killer.

In the meantime, the socioeconomic situation of the third generation Moroccan and Turkish youth was discouraging. Discrimination of Moroccans and Turks became a serious problem, which needed to be solved.

Since then, the crackdown on immigrants - and Muslims in particular - has accelerated. At the time of van Gogh's killing, progress was already underway on legislation that would expel immigrants who committed crimes. Currently, any non-EU citizen who is approved for a green card must attend a citizenship course with 500 hours of Dutch language instruction and 50 hours of «social orientation.»

Most Muslims live in the Amsterdam region, where 13 percent of the population are Muslim. This is followed by The Hague (11.4%) and Rotterdam (10.2%), while in Friesland and Drenthe, the Islamic community makes up less than 2 % of the population.

Meanwhile the situations for Muslims has deteriorated following the 9/11 bombings and the murder of Theo Van Gogh. On the one hand, extremist Islamic groups supported these acts and on the other discrimination, prejudice and attacks against all Muslims has risen significantly.

Background

- ▶ In 2002 CIDI, which monitors the level of antisemitism in the Netherlands, concluded in its yearly overview of antisemitic incidents in the Netherlands that the number of incidents had sharply increased. The number registered was up by 140%. There were disturbances in May 2003, 2004, and 2005 of the national commemoration of the victims of World War 2. For example in May 2003 five disturbances occurred. In most instances, the perpetrators were young Muslims. From 2003 onwards the number of antisemitic incidents has

⁴⁸ Taken from www.religionnewsblog.com/8727/netherlands-islamic-community-to-hit-1-million-in-2006



decreased. The yearly CIDI monitoring shows that an estimated 40-45% of the perpetrators come from the Muslim community.

Following these incidents which took place mainly in Amsterdam, many Jewish and Muslim NGOs and the Amsterdam municipality realized that something had to be done. They recognised the strong need to combat and contain the rise of antisemitism and to change the negative image of Muslims within some xenophobic parts of Dutch society.

During the previous years, some contact had already been made between the Jewish and Muslim communities. These contacts went on to be very useful and the many projects resulted also in contacts on a personal level.

Below you will find instances of Jewish-Muslim projects in different fields. They all, of course, focus on the improvement of relations between Dutch Jews (about 40.000) and Muslims and to combat antisemitism, islamophobia and xenophobia.

Existing Partnerships

Imams and Rabbis : Religious Leadership

► **The Ramadan Foundation and the Jewish community**

Thanks to the initiation of the Mimuna ceremonies by the Maimon Foundation, the Ramadan Festival Foundation invited the Jewish community to its Iftar meals (starting in 2005) during Ramadan. Both communities now share several meetings during each others ceremonial meals and celebrations.

Some results :

- Invitations between the Turkish and Progressive Jewish Communities.
- Visits by Sjoel West to Iftar meals to mosques in Amsterdam West.
- Joint Iftar meals in other cities
- Gathering Iftar by Maimon Foundation in Brussels and Antwerp.
- National Iftar in The Hague
- LJG dialogue committee inviting Muslims to the Sukkot

In 2005 Rabbi Avraham Soetendorp and the Secretary of the Council of Churches Ineke Bakker were the main speakers at the National Iftar. This National Iftar is already organized for five years by «Islam and Citizenship».

Jewish organizations were also invited in Mosques to participate in local Iftar meetings. Frequently they are organized by «Islam and Citizenship» and the Turkish organization Milli Görüş.

Similarly the Jewish community started to invite the Muslim community to attend Jewish holiday celebrations, like Sukkot.

► **The Maimon Foundation** (maintenance of the Heritage of Jewish-Moroccan Culture) **Mimuna**

About ten years ago Sami Kaspi founded the Maimon organization. Mr. Kaspi is a Moroccan Jew who is committed to create a bridge between Moroccan Jews and Muslims in the Netherlands. He started Mimuna parties in his own home. Now they have become big parties at the municipality of Amsterdam to which mainly Jews and Moroccans are invited, including the Ambassadors and their staff of Morocco and Israel.

Other successful activities :

- Maimon initiated open dialogues between Jews, Moroccans and the general Dutch public. These dialogues are implemented by organising seminars/meetings, education at schools, mosques and youth centres.



MAPPING REPORTS ON JEWISH MUSLIM DIALOGUE

The Netherlands

- Maimon organised educational travels to Morocco with youths, from the Technical School Amsterdam and the Jewish Moroccan Network Amsterdam.
 - Maimon joined in with the organisation of several important events concerning the Jewish and Moroccan communities.
 - Maimon combats antisemitism, islamophobia and racism by informing the public about the wonderful history of the Jews in Morocco (exhibitions in several museums)
 - The Maimon Foundation was nominated in 2003 by the Dutch Ministry of Education for the Prize for the education week.
- ▶ **Jewish Turkish Dialogue**
The Jewish Reform Community in Amsterdam started to invite the Muslim community for Jewish holidays, like Sukkot. Now there is a dialogue group between this community and the Turkish organization: Milli Görüs.
- ▶ **The Mosque and the Synagogue – December 2004**
Jewish and Muslim youth visited each others' praying houses in The Hague and Rotterdam to discuss each others' religion. The meetings were organized by: Islam and Citizenship, CIDI, Reform Jewish Community in The Hague and the Mevlana Mosque.

Academics and Intellectuals

- ▶ **Intercultural alliance – continuing**
CIDI took the initiative to further the promotion of the Classroom of Difference project in the Netherlands. In the new foundation Intercultural Alliance two Muslim organizations, among them the Muslim School Organization ISBO, a gay organization, RADAR (an antidiscrimination bureau), CEJI, EPTO and CIDI work together and approach schools to take up this diversity training program. The program has an overall school community approach. It trains and teaches the students, the staff and the teachers how to deal with and to combat racism and all forms of discrimination.
- ▶ **Training for youth workers**
The Anne Frank House organizes trainings for youth workers who encounter antisemitism. They also organise a one-day training for police officers who are dealing with day-to-day racism, including antisemitism and islamophobia. The police are trained to recognize racism, antisemitism, islamophobia, and homophobia.
- ▶ **Integration course for Imams**
In June 2005, Islam and Citizenship organized an integration course for Imams in Zeist. About 80 Imams participated, mostly Moroccan and Turkish. Among the speakers were Mohammed Sini and Ronny Naftaniel. It was the first time ever that such a conference took place and a Jewish speaker took part.
- ▶ **Course Islam and Judaism**
In 2005 in The Hague CIDI and Ulamon (a Muslim organization) organized a course for Jews and Muslims –(as well as other interested participants) in which Jews and Muslims learn about each others' religion. The course was repeated in Amsterdam in April 2006.



Community Grassroots

▶ **Coalition for Peace – May 2002**

The leaders of the Jewish Community initiated together with Muslim leaders the Coalition for Peace. (Naftaniel and Sini were amongst the initiators). This Coalition was founded during the Intifada with the aim to support the wish of Israelis and Palestinians to live in peace and security in two separate states. The Palestinian state should be based on the West Bank and Gaza and should establish diplomatic relations with the State of Israel. Mutual violence had to be halted. The Coalition succeeded in getting more than 80.000 signatures on a petition based on the objectives mentioned above.

▶ **Signing a contract for society - 2005**

In the Amsterdam neighbourhood de Baarsjes Sjoel West, Cidi, Maimon Foundation, Movib, Kantara, Anadha and Toekomst and all the three mosques intensively participated in an initiative from the district to combat all forms of discrimination, antisemitism and islamophobia. It resulted in the different religious institutions signing a contract and setting up an anti-discrimination bureau to report islamophobia. Thanks to the involvement of Sjoel West, CIDI became one of their advisors.

▶ **Jewish Moroccan Network Amsterdam**

After the disturbances of the commemoration of World War 2 in Amsterdam, May 2004 and those around Sjoel West (with its first MAJO street football tournament) Maimon advised the Mayor of Amsterdam, Job Cohen, to bring together Jewish and Moroccan communities in Amsterdam. After two years of debating and discussing, and sometimes even harsh discussions, in February 2006, the Network issued their manifesto. The Network will develop some activities, like organizing political cafés. The Network will also speak out against antisemitism and islamophobia. In May 2006 the participants travelled together to Morocco to learn about the Jews in this country, and to learn more about Islam. Participants came from numerous Moroccan organizations, Islam and Citizenship, Tans, and Jewish organizations, like the Central Jewish Board of the Netherlands, CIDI, and MAJO, Maimon etc.

▶ **Forum with Amsterdam politicians – February 2006**

In the Amsterdam neighbourhood, the Diamantbuurt some antisemitic incidents occurred, for which Muslim youngsters were blamed. At least that was how it was reported in the media. Later it appeared that the incidents were not very clear: was it real antisemitism or was it vandalism?

CIDI, Tans (Moroccan) and Milli Gorus (Turkish) organized a debate with the Amsterdam politicians. The debate was chaired by the director of Milli Gorus and closed by the chairman of Tans, a Moroccan student organization. It was followed by close contacts between CIDI and social workers in the Diamantbuurt

▶ **Moroccan-Jewish Women's Dialogue Group – October 2005**

On a private initiative a women's group of 12 Moroccan and Jewish women meets monthly and carries out concrete activities, organized by Sharon Polak.

▶ **Multicultural Women's Dialogue Group**

On a private initiative a multicultural women's group that involves numerous Jewish and Muslim women meet on a regular basis in Amsterdam, organized by Vera Bondi.

▶ **Dialogue Commission of the Liberal Jewish Community**

The liberal Jewish community in Amsterdam has an active Dialogue Committee that focuses mainly on dialogue between the different faith communities. There are projects with the Turkish and Moroccan Muslim communities and good contacts with different Christian communities. In 2006 a group of Imams visited the service on Shabbat (for a bat-mitzvah) on the



invitation of the Dialogue Committee. The rabbi, Rabbi Menno ten Brink, is a member himself, as are other members of the liberal synagogue. Last year they invited Muslims to a Sukkot-iftar, breaking the fasting during Ramadan, in the sukkah, as Sukkot was during Ramadan. Muslims came, they ate together and shared experiences with each other. A representative from each of the three communities participating (Jewish, Moroccan Muslims and Turkish Muslims) gave a short explanatory speech. It was a nice and very informal occasion in a very big and full sukkah.

They also arranged the French Friendship bus project's (May 27-29th 2007) visit to the Netherlands. The Friendship bus is an initiative of the French rabbi, Rabbi Serfaty, and a small school project is currently being planned.

Youth and Students

- ▶ **MAJO: (MAroccans and JOden, (Jews). Soccer Project – 2004, 2005, 2006, 2007**
In the neighbourhood the Baarsjes in Amsterdam many antisemitic incidents occurred around the synagogue (Synagogue West). One of the Jewish inhabitants and members of the synagogue, Erwin Brugman, initiated discussions in the neighbourhood between Jews and Muslims.

This dialogue resulted in strong cooperation and joint organisation of soccer tournaments for Jewish and Moroccan youth. Each tournament takes place in another part of Amsterdam where there are problems, or by invitation. After each tournament a communal kosher/halal meal is shared by all participants. The international media covered the first tournament (Israel, Morocco, Al Arabia satellite T.V.) This project was organized by Moroccan youth centres and elders from the Baarsjes, together with CIDI, Habonim, Erwin Brugmans and members of Sjoel West and Maimon.

The organisation always includes Jewish and Moroccan organisations in the neighbourhood where the tournament takes place.

The 2006 tournament enjoyed the first woman sub-tournament. All tournaments were a success. The MAJO – Tournaments as it is called now also got a prize for the best volunteer project in the Baarsjes 2006. The mayor of Amsterdam visited the tournament of 2006 in Amsterdam-Zuid.

- ▶ **Urban Dance Festival – September 2005**
In the Baarsjes in Amsterdam, a multicultural dance festival took place. Youth were invited to see and learn about each other's cultures in a familiar environment. The organizers were: CIDI, Sjoel West, Maimon, Youth Centres Zuidpool and La Rainbow.
- ▶ **Theatre Project – October 2005**
A theatre project in Utrecht, where Moroccans, Jews and Christians prepared an interactive play, involving a large group of youths. The play was performed in a youth centre with 40 youngsters from the different cultures present.

Partners included: «Geloven in Ontmoeting» (Believe in Interaction) - A coalition of different religious and non-religious organizations who wish to stimulate dialogue between different religions; Reform Jewish Community Utrecht; Orthodox Jewish Community Utrecht; Tuindorp Church; Mosque Essalaam, St. Aloysius Church; Mosque Overvecht, and CIDI.



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▶ **Rap Project – January 2006**

A large number of youth centres in Amsterdam are participating in a Jewish-Moroccan Rap project. Young people participated in a workshop on identity and on rapping and develop their one text and recorded it to CD. This CD was presented in the months which followed. Organized by the Central Jewish Board of the Netherlands.

▶ **Turkish and Jewish Youth – March and September 2005**

Habonim, CiJo, Milli Görüs and the Anne Frank House organized two get-togethers. One was focused on music, the other one consisted of a debating program.

▶ **CIJO** (CIDI youth organisation) has organised a cooking workshop for Jews and Arabs to learn about each others kitchens and cook Jewish and Arab (middle eastern) dishes together. This happened in April .

▶ **Dialogue meetings in Brabant – April 2005**

In Tilburg a city in Brabant (south of the Netherlands) several meetings of multicultural youth took place. Youth are trained to create their own program of initiatives in how to combat discrimination and prejudice. The participants were Moroccan, Jewish, Turkish and two youngsters with extreme-right sympathies. The initiators were Palet, a multicultural institute for the promotion of integration in southern Holland and CIDI.

▶ **Trip to Westerbork – May 2005**

A large group of multicultural organizations combined to organize a large trip for youth from all over Holland to Westerbork to learn about World War II. The initiator was M-Zine, a glossy Moroccan magazine. This organization approached CIDI and Islam and Citizenship to be one of the co-initiators. The third party was the multicultural bureau Forum. More than 300 mainly young Muslims took part together with about 20 young Jews. At the same period two schools participated in a bus trip to Auschwitz. Co-partners were the municipality of Amsterdam, CIDI and the Auschwitz Committee. About 100 students, aged 15, from mostly migrant backgrounds, participated.

▶ **World War II in Perspective**

After the disturbances in May 2003 of the commemoration of World War II the municipality of Amsterdam started educational projects in Amsterdam high schools. Now Moroccan and Jewish students together teach high school students about World War II and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. This was necessary as many antisemitic incidents were inspired by this conflict. The focus is to separate the conflict and antisemitism. This project is organised by Diversion.

Thanks to cooperation between Sjoel West, all of the Mosques and organisations in the Baarsjes Amsterdam, joint action is taken each year to sustain a respectful commemoration of W.W.2. Months of dialogue, support and cooperative organisation take place before the actual ceremony on May 4 each year.

Diversion has also started a new project, called **HEILIG?! (HOLY?!)** in cooperation with the Biblical museum. It consists of lessons at schools (vmbo level) and a one hour tour through the museum, visiting the exhibition : **The temple mount is mine.**

This project is carried out by peer-educators who teach in pairs. The school can give its preference, because there are Christian, Muslim and Jewish educators. It's a short programme based principles of the three biggest monotheistic religions and their relationship with Jerusalem and the temple mount. The exhibition is set up around a 3D model of the temple mount, which was made by Conrad Schick in the late 19th century. The children learn why Jerusalem and the temple mount/Haram al Sharif is so important to the different faiths. Also they learn that Jerusalem has had lots of different rulers during its history. It's also a



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very interactive way of learning about the basic principles of these religions. Often young people are very interested in Judaism, which seems to be the religion they know least about.

▶ **Freedom Project – May 2005**

On Liberation Day, 10 Jewish and Moroccan youths made a film in Rotterdam about the importance of freedom.

Partners: FORUM: Multicultural organization and CIDI.





UNITED KINGDOM



Introduction

Jewish Community in the UK

- ▶ British Jewry is a community based on immigrants, although some trace their origins back over nearly 350 years. Our modern history dates from 1656 with the settlement in London of a small group of Sephardi (Spanish and Portuguese) Jews. This re-introduction of open Jewish life into Christian England involved no more than a score of families who were quickly followed by co-religionists of Ashkenazi (Eastern European) stock, coming either directly from Germany or again via Holland. The community grew slowly and by 1800 numbered between 20,000 and 25,000. By the early 1880s, when an escalating influx from Eastern and Central Europe was given extra impetus by the passing of the antisemitic May Laws in Russia in 1882, England was home to a little over 60,000 Jews.

Between 1918 and 1950, British Jewry grew in size from some 300,000 to over 400,000 but since then there has been a steady decrease in numbers. In 1999, the British Jewish population was estimated at about 283,000 people. British Jewry in common with other western Jewish communities has had to face the paradox that acceptance by the wider society has involved a cost that was not foreseen by those who initiated the processes towards that very acceptance.

Today, just under two-thirds of British Jews live within the geographical boundaries of Greater London and the remainder are either in smaller communities or spread as individuals through the Regions. There are strong long-established communities throughout Northern England, especially in the major industrial centres of Manchester, Leeds, Glasgow and Liverpool. Manchester numbers some 28,000 Jews and Leeds about 10,000. Nevertheless, when seen with a broad brush British Jewry is, and historically has always been, pre-eminently a (Greater) London entity. The concentration of British Jewry within «London» has always been its most marked geographic feature, although the boundaries of that London have changed over time.⁴⁹

Muslim Community in the UK

- ▶ Islam has been known in England for a long time; there are references to Islamic scholars in the Prologue to Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales* (1386).

Following the anti-Islamic frenzy of the Crusades, Britain became friendly with some Islamic countries. Queen Elizabeth I, for example, asked the Ottoman Sultan Murad for naval assistance against the Spaniard Armada.

The first recorded Englishman to become a Muslim was John Nelson, who converted to Islam at some point in the 16th Century.

The first large group of Muslims in Britain arrived about 300 years ago. They were sailors recruited in India to work for the East India Company, and so it's not surprising that the first Muslim communities were found in port towns.

The next wave of Muslim immigration to Britain followed the opening of the Suez Canal in 1869. The increase in trade caused a demand for men to work in ports and on ships.



Most of these immigrants came from the Yemen, probably because Aden was the main refuelling stop for ships between Britain and the Far East, and many of the seamen later settled in the port cities of Cardiff, Liverpool, South Shields, Hull, and London. There are now an estimated 70-80,000 Yemenis living in Britain, who form the longest-established Muslim group in Britain.

Britain's Muslim population are almost all people who immigrated to Britain in the 1950s, 60s, and 70s, or their descendants. Many of the immigrants in the 1950s and 60s came from India and Pakistan in search of a better material life. They could earn 30 times as much in Britain as they could in Pakistan.

In 1915 there were 10,000 Muslims in Britain. Now there are between 1 and 2 million British Muslims (2% - 4% of the population), and over half of them were born in Britain.

Islam is Britain's second most popular religion. Over 600,000 of Britain's 1.5 to 2 million Muslims are active in their faith, which is a high proportion by Christian standards. Most British Muslims belong to the Sunni tradition of Islam. There are over 600 mosques in the UK and around 60 Muslim schools.⁵⁰ As of 2001, 38% of Muslims lived in London.⁵¹

Existing Partnerships

Imams and Rabbis : Religious Leadership

▶ **Joint seminars focus on religious texts**

Other groups have also found that focusing on religion in their contact has played an important part in dispelling the myths and enmity. An-Nisa (Arabic for «The Women»), a Muslim organisation managed by women, runs dialogue seminars in partnership with the Leo Baeck College Centre for Jewish Education in London. For the first seminar they chose a neutral venue, the London Interfaith Centre, and discussed «the possibility of reconciliation between our religions». It was led by the coordinator of An-Nisa together with a woman Rabbi, and focused on religious texts. It was very successful and left many participants wanting to engage more with the other community. Some were surprised to discover how much they had in common with each other, particularly on issues of identity, which both communities struggle with (e.g. between being Jewish and British, and Muslim and British). The second seminar was equally successful. It focused on a concept from the Muslim side «Struggle and Surrender». Subsequent seminars have focused on «Prophecy» and then «Women and Prophecy». At these seminars were equal numbers of Muslims and Jews, usually about 15 of each. They were publicised widely, so that even if people could not come they were aware of them. Having built up trust by discussing religious issues, the group felt confident enough to tackle more political issues, especially the Middle East, in later seminars.

▶ **Religious food authorities co-ordinate and co-operate**

Shared concerns have brought together the Halal Food Authority, which supervises halal food across the UK, and the Beth Din, the Jewish board responsible for overseeing the production of kosher food. Muslim and Jewish laws on animal slaughter share basic foundations, including reverence for the animal. The director of the Halal Food Authority says the two organisations work informally but closely over matters of shared interest to maintain the religious law in secular society.

⁵⁰ «Religion & Ethics-Islam» www.bbc.co.uk/religion/religions/islam/history/uk_1.shtml

⁵¹ (Source : National Statistics 2001 Census) www.nya.org.uk/Templates/internal.asp?NodeID=94841



- ▶ **The Jewish Christian and Muslim Standing Conference in Europe (JCM)**, now in its thirtieth year, takes place annually in Bendorf in Germany and exists to promote dialogue, understanding and solidarity amongst members of the three Abrahamic faiths. Organisers of the conference believe that dialogue is best achieved through personal encounters between individuals in a safe and respectful environment. Dialogue is developed through lectures, discussions and project groups (such as music, meditation and creative design), which take place during the week long conference attended each year by more than a hundred people

Academics and intellectuals

- ▶ **The Inter Faith Network** for the UK was founded in 1987 to promote good relations between the faith communities of this country. It is supported by local and national faith groups, academic institutions and bodies concerned with multi-faith education. It was established on the principle that, «*dialogue and co-operation can only prosper if they are rooted in respectful relations that do not blur or undermine the distinctiveness of different religious traditions*», and to provide a, «*trusted, neutral, non-denominational framework for people of different faiths to discuss issues of shared concern*». (Source: The Inter Faith Network for the United Kingdom, brochure) The Network runs an information service offering advice to local interfaith groups and linking national and local interfaith initiatives. It issues publications, such as, «*The Local Interfaith Guide*», which provides guidelines for positive interfaith encounters. Examples of the Network's current projects include raising awareness of the importance of religious identity amongst policy makers and service providers in the public sector; working with SACREs (Standing Advisory Council on Religious Education) to promote interfaith issues in schools and regularly producing an invaluable directory of the UK's faith community organisations and places of worship, «*A Multi-Faith Directory*». The Network works with Muslim and Jewish communities alongside the nine major faiths that it represents.
- ▶ **Forum for UK organisations focusing on Middle East cultural events**
The Building Bridges Forum for Arab-Jewish Cultural Exchange was established in London in June 2004 for all those individuals and organisations active in the work of encouraging mutual respect and understanding and creating co-operative arts projects between Arabs, Jews, Palestinians and Israelis. 17 people from 14 organisations have already found this a valuable meeting point. Through this forum they have become acquainted with one another's work and can share their aspirations and ideas and find support for their own endeavours and collaborations with others. The forum is co-ordinated by a Jewish woman who is director of The Jewish Music Institute (JMI) based at SOAS (School of Oriental and African Studies) in London.
- ▶ **Multi Exposure:**
This is a group of photographers and filmmakers. Each year a British, Palestinian and Israeli artist are each awarded a grant for work either in Britain or Israel, with the results exhibited and published in an accompanying book
- ▶ **OJ Music:**
Represents a band called Zaman E Salam (Time for Peace), a group of Arab and Israeli musicians based in Israel and London. The music includes Sephardic flamenco guitar, Arabic song with oud, bass guitar and Israeli singers.
- ▶ **Olive Tree Project, City University, London:** Grants scholarships to 10 Palestinian and 10 Israeli students to study at City University and participate in a cultural and social programme designed to encourage dialogue and mutual understanding.



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▶ **Gaining an insight into the other : creative writing**

Exiled Writers Ink! supports writers in exile in the UK. It uses writing as a medium to bring people together to explore ethnic and cultural identity and to develop dialogue through literature and poetry. It was started in 1999 by a Jewish woman and is now run by a committee, which includes both Muslims and Jews. There have been eight creative writing workshops for equal numbers of Jews and Muslims, sometimes in mixed groups and sometimes separately. They use discussion of conflict or topics of mutual interest to produce a piece of creative writing. A major focus at present is on Jews and Muslims. The organisation works in performance, academia and workshops, as well as publishing a magazine. High profile events raise awareness of human rights violations, and of the problems facing refugees. Monthly events at a poetry café in London are «open-mike» nights, often for Arabs, Israelis, Muslims, and Jews who write poetry about the Israel-Palestine conflict. «Across the Divide» is a series of Exiled Writers Ink! events specifically for Jews and Muslims, which aims to build bridges and create a supportive environment in which issues can be explored productively. The first event, held at the Jewish Museum, was called «Gaining an Insight Into the Other», and Muslim locations are being sought for future events. In the safe space of the workshop, people are more expressive. Many of the Muslim participants come from a background of censorship and cannot even mention Israel freely; the Syrian committee member chooses to remain anonymous.

Community Grassroots

▶ **The Three Faiths Forum** was established in January 1997 and is run by an advisory board of representatives from Christian, Jewish and Muslims backgrounds. Its aims are :

- To encourage friendship, goodwill and understanding amongst people of the three Abrahamic faiths in the UK and elsewhere.
- To promote support for and public recognition of the importance of groups where people of the Muslim, Christian and Jewish faiths meet and share common interests and experiences.
- To encourage respect for religious differences between the three faiths on a basis of equality and exploring and enjoying those differences where appropriate.
- To promote training of ministers of religion of the three faiths in their common roots, understanding of their differences and encourage respect for each other on a basis of equality. The Forum emphasises the importance of working with the Christian community, which it considers the host community for the Jewish and Muslim faiths in Britain. As a result of contacts made by the Three Faiths Forum, groups have been set up in the medical, legal and parliamentary fields. They also run occasional lectures such as one entitled, «Respecting other faiths by the Law of God...or of man?», which took place in September 2004. As part of its «diversity week» events, Bournemouth University hosted a Three Faiths evening of workshops, «with a range of subjects including human rights, the family, the environment and education, combined with the lighter subject of food and music». (Source : www.threefaithsforum.org.uk)

▶ **Two minority religious groups find common ground**

A new dialogue group in North London decided to focus on religion at their meetings. They have called themselves «Kalifa Olam» : Kalifa means «trustee» in Arabic and Olam means «world» in Hebrew. The group draws on the impetus to look after and heal the world, which is integral to both traditions, and believes that coming together is one way of fulfilling this. What is unusual about the group is that it is made up of Masorti Jews and Ismaili Muslims, two religious groups, which are both minorities within their communities. This immediately gave them some common ground to work from; they discovered that Ismaili and Jewish traditions are not dissimilar, in that both focus more on human relationships than a relationship with God. One of the Muslim men even said he feels he has more in common with a Masorti Jew than, for example, a Sunni Orthodox Muslim. The group was



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started informally - by a Muslim man and woman, and a Jewish man and woman – after the two women met on a course and found they got on very well. They decided to bring their communities together to address their ignorance of each other, and agreed to take things slowly and keep meetings small. It began with four Jews and four Muslims meeting for dinner at one of their houses, bringing with them artefacts to use as prompts to talk about their religion. The session went so well that it lasted for hours. They have had two more sessions with the same people. At the second meeting, the Jews brought some Talmudic extracts and the Muslims spoke about Ismaili teachings. Although established by individuals, the group is affiliated to the local synagogue, which had set up a *Tikkun Olam* («healing the world») group and agreed that a dialogue group should be one of its projects. Their Rabbi was a guest speaker and he facilitated a discussion on «truth versus peace» about how truth can sometimes cause conflict.

► **Developing a strategic partnership on local issues**

A Muslim-Jewish forum has existed unofficially among the strictly religious observant Muslim and Jewish communities of North East London since Muslims first moved to the area over 40 years ago. Members of the Jewish community recall welcoming Muslims settling there, as they reminded them of their own position in Britain a generation before. Also, they welcomed a second religious moral and ethical base to work with on a local level. The two communities have worked towards developing common strategies for action. In 2001, the forum was officially launched by, a Rabbi, a Muslim and a local Jewish councillor. The forum consists of ten men (five Jewish, five Muslim) and holds open meetings every six weeks. Its aims are to act as a point of access for each community to the other, to allay the unfounded fears that each community may have of the other and to work together on developing a strategic partnership on projects for which the Jewish and Muslim communities have common aims. As a result of the meetings there are plans to develop the initiative further, in particular to encourage greater female participation by having a women's branch of the same forum. The forum encourages Muslims and Jews to stand for local council positions in order that they can represent the opinions of both their communities. It also enables Muslims and Jews to work successfully together on local issues that affect both communities, for example shared housing concerns. A member of the Muslim Housing Association in the area reported good working relations with Jewish housing groups, including assistance in setting up his association. Both communities have representatives on local housing boards and work closely together

► **Campaigning together about Israel-Palestine**

One group involved in explicitly political contact based on the situation in Israel-Palestine is a forum in Manchester, which includes Muslims and Jews campaigning together about injustices. The forum meets monthly and has organised visual protests to raise awareness of agreed issues such as the Separation Wall and house demolitions. A Jewish woman member of the forum explained that informal networks have arisen from this work, including a group that organised a memorial to those who died at Deir Yassin during the 1948 war, at which both Jews and Muslims marked the anniversary with poems, stories, film and reflection. The participants were 50% Muslim, 50% Jewish and it is hoped that this will be developed into an annual event. Other groups working together on Israel-Palestine issues are the Scottish Palestinian Solidarity Campaign and the Scottish Friends of Peace Now. They hold joint events for Muslims and Jews.

► **Promoting peace through cultural exchange**

Windows for Peace are «*Jews and Palestinians from both sides of the Green Line working together to promote acquaintance, understanding and reconciliation between Israelis and Palestinians in the region through educational and cultural programmes, media and art primarily with youth of both communities*». It has now been set up in Britain «*to promote contact and understanding and reconciliation between Jews, Arabs and Muslims living in the UK and to further the mutual recognitions of each community and their human rights*». The project began in 2004. Windows for Peace UK (Windows) has organised a storytelling



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evening in Manchester at which performers told stories from the Palestinian and Jewish traditions and a band played Middle-Eastern music. The Windows art exhibition, «Dreaming Peace» was shown at a weekend retreat organised by a local synagogue. In London, the Jews Free School (JFS) has adopted Windows as its charity and is holding an art competition to design a logo. One of the people inspired by the Windows initiative was a young Jewish woman working at a British Jewish youth movement. She attends the *Alif- Aleph UK* dialogue sessions and is involved with a new dialogue group affiliated to her North London synagogue, and was very keen on engaging her youth movement in dialogue. Windows is working with the Jewish youth movement to produce an educational programme and a magazine created by the children involved in the project. Hafla was set up in 2002 as a London-based organisation to create cultural events celebrating a vision of peace and prosperity in the Middle East. It promotes the arts of Jewish and Muslim cultures and raises money for dialogue projects and peace initiatives in the Middle East. The two communities are brought together at these social events to celebrate culture and ethnicity, and engage in the political situation in a positive and productive manner. Spiro Ark was set up to educate about Jewish culture and history and organises lots of cultural events around Muslim-Jewish dialogue. The co creator explains that, «*Jewish heritage cannot be looked upon in isolation; there must be interaction with the wider community. We must not be afraid to build bridges and in doing so people must look through the painful side as well as the common ground.*» Originally from Israel, she brought over her great experience of interfaith work to Britain. She had jointly directed a women's club in an Arab village, which created a space for Jewish and Arab women to have access to each other and work together on common issues such as childcare. She also directed a language school (nominated for a Nobel Peace Prize) for Arabs and Jews in Northern Israel, where Arabs learnt Hebrew and Jews learnt Arabic. In Manchester, the Olive Co-operative has set up Arabic lessons for Jews and Muslims above a Palestinian café. This has been most popular among students and about ten per cent of the participants are Jewish.

- ▶ **British Friends of Neve Shalom/Wahat Al Salaam:**
Neve Shalom/Wahat Al Salaam is a village in Israel where Jewish and Palestinian Israelis live and work together. The Friends organisation in the UK publicises the village's work and has held fundraising events including its «Sounds of Hope and Peace» concert at which Jewish and Arab musicians performed together.
- ▶ **Hafla:**
Is a London-based organisation creating cultural events celebrating a vision of peace and prosperity in the Middle East.
- ▶ **JMI Forum for Arab-Jewish dialogue through music:**
The forum has been holding workshops and performances since 2000. One of the forum's members is a specialist in Iraqi Jewish music and produces CDs of Arabic music and the music of the Bene Israel of India. She is director of «Rivers of Babylon», an ensemble that performs Iraqi Jewish and Arabic music.
- ▶ **The Spiro Ark:**
Is a London-based charitable organisation that educates and enthuses about Jewish history and culture through courses and events. A number of their activities involve Palestinians and Israelis in London (See above 4.1).
- ▶ **St Ethelburga's Centre for Reconciliation and Peace:**
Is based in Bishopsgate, London and is a venue available for hire for dialogue especially for groups in conflict both at home and from overseas.
- ▶ **YaDArts:**
YaDArts describes itself as «Diaspora Jewish culture in the present tense». The organisation promotes live and digital music, film production, performance and visual art, dance and educational programmes from various ethnic groups, including Israelis and Palestinians.



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► **The Inner Cities Religious Council (ICRC)**

The Inner Cities Religious Council (ICRC) «*is a national forum for members of faith communities to work with the government on issues of regeneration, neighbourhood renewal, social inclusion, and other relevant cross-departmental policies and processes. It works closely with the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister's Neighbourhood Renewal Unit. Members of the Council impact on the development of government policy and provide a channel through which government can liaise with faith communities at a local level and build capacity. The ICRC was established in 1992 [and] includes members from the five largest faith communities in urban areas in England : Christians, Hindus, Jews, Muslims and Sikhs*». (Source : www.neighbourhood.gov.uk)

- **The London Civic Forum** is another example of Muslims and Jews working side-by-side with other faith groups to make their voices heard. It «*informs the Greater London Authority and other pan-London organisations on issues that affect the lives and opportunities of those who live and work in London*». (Source : www.londoncivicforum.org.uk). The Forum is divided into sections, one of which is a faith sector, a group of five people representing different faiths, including Muslim and Jewish. An informal faith-based network has developed out of the Forum, which discusses common issues faced when working with their respective religious communities.

Youth and Students

- **The Respect campaign¹** is part of TimeBank; a national media campaign to raise awareness of the value of giving time and inspiring a new generation of volunteers in niche areas such as sport, mentoring, and the arts. It was launched in April 2002 to encourage young people to become involved in interfaith initiatives by volunteering their time to practical projects in schools, youth groups and the workplace. Respect works in partnership with the leaders of the UK's faith communities, the National Youth Agency, The Prince's Trust, the BBC and the Queen's Golden Jubilee Campaign. Projects are arranged around issues of tolerance and religious understanding, with examples of past projects and ideas for future projects featured on Respect's website (www.respect.org.uk). Some projects are targeted at a multi-faith base and others between specific faith groups, such as the Muslim and Jewish communities. One such project was initiated by a Jewish student to explore art as a vehicle for peace, called «*Dream Dialogues between Muslims and Jews*». Eighty Muslims and eighty Jews of all ages took part in dialogue through postcards and these postcards were then transformed into a video and book. TimeBank launched a series of interfaith meals in November 2003 to raise awareness of its Respect initiative. The aim of these meals is to bring together prominent people of different faiths and backgrounds to discuss interfaith issues. It is hoped they will prove a springboard for further interfaith work on local projects

Initiatives and Good Practices

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Imams and Rabbis : Religious Leadership

► **Community institutions make contact**

The Muslim Council of Britain (MCB) and The Board of Deputies of British Jews (The Board) meet regularly to discuss issues of mutual concern. In September 2003, they met to discuss positive areas of co-operation between the Jewish and Muslim communities in Great Britain. The meeting discussed the scope for a better understanding of the needs of the



two communities and provided an opportunity to discuss ways of lessening of tension between the communities. The Board and MCB agreed to continue co-operation to counter the proposed ban on kosher and halal meat in Britain by the Farm Animal Welfare Council, and discussed issues such as religious and racial incitement legislation and the religious question in the 2001 census.

Academics and intellectuals

► **Conflict resolution through drama and theatre**

The Tricycle Theatre in North London has always worked with different ethnic groups in the area, particularly the Jewish, Black and Irish communities and has run separate youth drama groups for Muslims and Jews. The two women who run educational projects for the Tricycle see drama and the creative arts as a means to dialogue. They have devised «Coming Together», a youth theatre group for young people of Jewish and Islamic heritage to explore each other's cultural and ethnic identities, and in doing so building trust and shared understanding. A Muslim drama group had been run for 8 year olds, and a Jewish group for 11 year olds, however it was felt that the two groups might be too young to work alongside each other so a new group of teenagers from both communities was set up. The Tricycle found it difficult to know where to draw the groups from, realising in particular that they knew very little about how to tap into Muslim youth networks, so they went to Muslim organisations for guidance. Participants of «Coming Together» will work on a theatrical production and take part in drama workshops, which deal with issues of identity, look at the similarities between the two communities and provide a space in which they can share ideas and experiences. Writers, directors and actors are invited to talk to the young people. Participants are encouraged to document their thoughts and feelings, either as a piece of theatre, a poem or script. Their creative work will then be shared as a way of stimulating debate and understanding.

Community Grassroots

► **Informal exchange visits to places of worship**

One route to theological or religious contact is via arranged visits to synagogues and mosques. Individual religious leaders have initiated contact between the two communities, such as; the North London Rabbi who has invited Muslim children into his synagogue with their schools to learn about Judaism; or the Imam and Rabbi in South London who have started a 10- week dialogue course which attracts 20–25 students. A Brighton Imam has developed good relations with all five Rabbis in the local Jewish community. He places strong emphasis on community relations between Jews and Muslims in Britain and has attempted to mirror positive national relations in his own city. At one of the five synagogues, he was the first non-Jewish speaker to give the annual memorial lecture. Similar exchanges have taken place in other British cities, where Jewish speakers have addressed Muslims in Mosques. In London, the East London Mosque in conjunction with the Museum of Immigration oversaw a local community Muslim-Jewish dialogue group tour of the East End. The aim was to trace a shared history of immigration and culture.

► **Formal exchange visits to places of worship**

More formal visits have been initiated by organisations such as The Maimonides Foundation, which has arranged tours of Jewish and Muslim places of worship to give religious and secular leaders from both communities a chance to meet. In March 2004, the Foundation took a delegation of religious and secular leaders from both the Jewish and Muslim community on a visit to the Suleymaniye Mosque in Istanbul. The delegation included representatives from the Office of the Chief Rabbi, the Sephardi community, the



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Liberal Jewish community and the Jewish business community. The group also included ambassadors of several Muslim countries as well as of Israel. A return visit is planned to a London Synagogue.

► **Campaigning on local «bread and butter» issues**

Local and domestic issues can often be better dealt with when the two communities co-ordinate and work together. In the East End of London, the Chair of the Bengali Traders Association and the Chair of the Jewish Traders meet regularly and work together campaigning on local «bread and butter» issues, such as jointly appealing on council rates. When leaflets were being distributed outside the local mosque, which both Chairs felt were antisemitic, they went together to ask the Imam to try and stop this happening; he responded and the leafleting ceased. The Jewish trader feels he has come to understand more about Islam through this association. He describes his relationship with Muslims as existing along business lines: they all work beside one other so they must work together and get on. Outside of business hours they do not have much contact, as many of the traders do not actually live in the area. Nevertheless, he feels that by having worked together on local issues, he and his counterpart have developed a friendly and co-operative relationship. He describes the East End as generally peaceful in terms of Muslim-Jewish issues. However, some of the changes during the 2005 General Election may be significant to Muslims and Jews. In Northern Ireland, both the Jewish and Muslim communities are very small, so it is in both their interests to work together on local issues. The Belfast Jewish community works particularly closely with the Belfast Muslim Families Association and the An-Nisa's women's group.

► **Working together to access funding for families**

In the same area of North East London, another unique and successful initiative has emerged between local Muslim and Jewish people. The Interlink Foundation based in Stamford Hill, is a Jewish organisation which co-ordinates community and social support for local orthodox Jewish families. It wanted to apply to the government's Sure Start programme for support for children of low-income families with special needs. Funding from Sure Start is designed to assist mainstream groups and can therefore not support projects that promote religion or that are exclusively for single religious groups. This has created problems for Muslim and Jewish communities, who have felt that mainstream services do not necessarily meet their cultural and religious needs. However, as it is government policy to promote community cohesion, Muslim and Jewish groups benefited by working together to access such funding. With a joint application through Interlink, Muslim and Jewish communities were successful in receiving funding from the New Opportunities Fund (a community fund established from National lottery funding) in addition to establishing Sure Start programmes to cater for their children under the age of four. The Interlink Foundation has been successful in raising funds for other projects in the area and hopes to increase its success when it opens a second office in North West England, where Muslims and Jews live in similar proximity.

► **Co-operation in a rural setting**

Cornwall has very small Jewish and Muslim communities, and shows how pragmatic contact can be helpful and necessary when both groups find themselves in a minority. A member of the local Jewish community is also the Local Education Authority (LEA) officer responsible for religious education, where he delivered courses on Islam for the LEA. He was also the officer responsible for ensuring Muslims had a place on the Standing Advisory Council on Religious Education (SACRE).

► **Video and photography workshops trigger constructive discussion**

Community Speak is an organisation that fosters understanding between local communities through the integrated use of workshops and multimedia. One of their new projects is aimed at Muslim and Jewish 16-20 year olds in London, in which video and photography are used as a means to explore each other's lives, culture, and ethnic and social identity. A



similar project had already been successful in Bradford, with four groups of young people from the Asian Women and Children's Centre, a Christian church, a Muslim school and a youth club from an estate. The Bradford experience showed how funders are themselves brought into dialogue through the project, since they have to build bridges with each other in order to work together. The project has three levels of importance: the experience the participants have, the bridges they build and the impact on the wider community. The groups initially remain separate, since an important aspect of conflict resolution is that each group should explore their own identity and where they are coming from before they can be brought into dialogue with another group. Participants are then given some instruction on how to use a camera and then they go and take photos and make films about their lives. This, the organisers have found, is an amazing way to gain insight into communities as it is so direct and can go much further and deeper than any film maker could. The groups then watch each other's films and discuss them. Each group gains an insight into the other community, which is not tainted by stereotype and prejudice, and can begin to have some understanding of each other. The organisers of the project believe that often too many barriers exist between communities to start dialogue.

Youth and Students

► «Tackling» youth contact: interfaith football

The Maimonides Foundation initiated an Interfaith Football programme over five years ago in which Muslim and Jewish school children, aged 9-11, spend three Sunday mornings playing football together. As their partner in this scheme, Arsenal Football Club hosts the children and provides coaching for them at its football ground. Over 150 children from 16 different schools (Jewish and Muslim as well as secular), synagogues and faith-based community centres have taken part. The project aims to be inclusive of the spectrum of Muslim and Jewish cultures living in Britain: Muslim participants included children from Pakistani, Indian, Bangladeshi, Turkish, Iranian and North African backgrounds; the Jewish children came from Orthodox, Reform, Masorti and Liberal congregations.

► Reaching out to other faith groups: schools and youth groups

Schools and youth groups play a crucial role in encouraging faith communities to reach out to other faith groups and the wider society. One example is a Muslim primary school in South London that has initiated an exchange programme with a Christian school in the area. Although there is not as yet an exchange with the Jewish community, the Muslim school hopes to develop one in the future: «*Muslim schools do not want to be isolated*», said a teacher from the school. Jewish youth movements, in particular, are well established and well organised, often at a national as well as local level. Muslim youth groups are not so well established and are certainly less visible, as some of those trying to reach out to Muslim youth have found. Both Muslim and Jewish youth groups are involved in interesting and innovative interfaith projects across Britain, such as the conservation project initiated by a Jewish youth group in Essex. Over 30 young people from various faith groups based in the area came together in February 2004 to plant trees at a local park. Amongst those represented at the event were people from the local Mosque; Hindu Temple; Muslim youth group, Jewish youth group; mixed faith youth group and mixed faith women's group. After the tree planting, each group gave a short reading on the importance of nature, conservation and trees in their own faith. According to the Jewish youth movement's director, «*the event was a huge success - it was great to see young people from different backgrounds all working together in a common pursuit*». One group that focuses on schools and youth groups is Cardiff Interfaith. They promote understanding of religions among young people by organising lectures and visits to cultural centres for school children and students. Every year they hold a Peace March during One World Week, where they tour places of worship in the Cardiff Bay area with faith leaders speaking at each stop. Also in Wales, in Llanelli, a religious studies teacher came up with the idea of the Peace Mala, a



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peace bracelet where different coloured beads representing the teachings of the main world religions were threaded together as one. She was prompted to do this after her and her pupils were discussing the terrible events of 9/11. She explains: «*I soon realised that our local community had not escaped the aftermath of the September 11. Islamophobia and racist taunts had become common-place in our school and within the same year, the synagogue in Swansea was desecrated.*» The initiative aims to promote racial harmony and understanding and has already spread far and wide. (Source : www.peacemala.org.uk) The Jews» Free School (JFS) in London is trying to teach their students more about other communities through their informal education programme. They recently held a multicultural education day where they invited a range of guests including people from FAIR (Forum Against Islamophobia and Racism) and Operation Black Vote. This was very successful and gave the students a chance to interact with people from outside their community.

Post-Conference Addendum

The following organisations are also involved in the field of Jewish Muslim Dialogue :

▶ **Alif-Aleph UK**

This is a group of British Muslims and British Jews brought together by Richard Stone, President of the Jewish Council for Racial Equality, in 2003. He was able to build on the many positive contacts in British Muslim communities he had made in five of the previous nine years when he was member of the Runnymede Islamophobia Commission, and Chair of it from 1999 to 2004.

▶ **Rumi Foundation**

This is an organization seeking to foster greater understanding and harmony through cultural programs such as workshops and events. It has just completed three interfaith concert events co-ordinated by Khaled Hakim.

▶ **Salaam Shalom Radio Station UK**

This Muslim-Jewish project encourages dialogue between the two faiths. The board members are made up from representatives from both faith and they have set up the first ever Muslim-Jewish Internet Radio station in Europe www.salaamshalom.org.uk/. Live programmes are presented by volunteers and there are joint faiths programmes as well as programmes that are solely presented by either Muslims or Jews. Future plans includes a joint project by Muslim and Jewish musicians.

▶ **WfP Writers for Peace UK**

WfP exists to explore the issues and realities in the search for reconciliation in the Middle East. The focus of our group is seeking dialogue through creative writing. They meet once a month in central London and one member leads the group in a creative writing session. They have held a number of readings of their work and published a brief pamphlet. Some members also publish work arising from the meetings in magazines and newspapers.

