



7<sup>th</sup> Annual Conference | 2016



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## **MESSAGE FROM ILJA SICHROVSKY, DIRECTOR**

Growing up in Vienna in the 1990s, my T-shirts were made in China, my Walkman was made in Japan and the music I listened to was made in the U.S. I ate Thai food and drank African coffee. The Austrian-ness around us seemed to get lost among all this multiculturalism-- both in products as well as in people. The French-ness, Italian-ness and German-ness of Europe seemed to be slowly slipping away.

I, of course, was generally ok with that. For a long time, I felt that whatever was left to be Austrian-- or French or German, for that matter-- could be best kept somewhere in a museum. Yet I still had a feeling of concern-- a foreboding that, someday soon, people might once again become afraid for their identity.

And now here we are, looking at a world rallying the last troops it has to defend cultures marked by xenophobia, intolerance, religious radicalization and the century-old hatred of everything that is different. And, as usual it is the "others" that pay the price for a collective crisis of identity. Once more we are turning against the so-called "enemy within" that we claim weakens our societies, takes our jobs and destroys our culture: Skin color, religious belief and national identities are again the simplest lines along which we divide our communities and minorities-- often Muslims and Jews-- are yet again the main target of rising hate crimes.

While we talk about each other, the ever more right-wing governments that rule us all are discussing ways to ban our religious slaughter and circumcision rituals. While we live in fear of one

another, emboldened racists in our cities are tearing the hijabs and kippas off the heads of young men and women in busses and undergrounds while swastikas and pig heads are desecrating both of our houses of worship.

So what to do if you're just one butterfly flying over that forest fire, trying to decide whether to burn for a good cause, or to leave to some form of safety? You need to get yourself some strength in numbers.

Most of us are actually still sane. We don't want to live in a world where men in brown or black shirts tell us what to do, where to do it, what to wear, what to think and what better not to talk about in public. But that's where the problem starts and it's where it has to end through making a stand. When I was 25, the longest conversation I could ever remember having with a Muslim was ordering a kebab. Isolated and isolating myself from their community, which came out of a natural instinct, actually created fear of the other. It took a young Pakistani to approach me at an international conference for me to change. By actively seeking out a conversation, Mustafa gave me one of the greatest gifts in this world: Not only a true and sincere friendship, but the certainty that the simple act of dialogue, when used efficiently, can be a powerful tool – especially for minorities, to organize and defend themselves by building alliances by increasing their numbers.

Barely seven years later, I founded and directed an organization that hosts 150 people from around the world at a Muslim Jewish conference-- a place where they could talk *to* each other instead of *about* each other, where

interfaith and intercultural dialogue is taken as seriously as a prevention tool for hate crimes and racism as security institutions are as tools to protect us from them.

As a Jew from Austria, who was numbed by the age of 11 or 12 by yearly attendance at concentration camps--which became a bitter routine rather than an active reflection on remembrance and history--it took a group of young Muslims from 40 different countries to change my mind. I watched them say prayers for lost loved ones in the middle of Babi Yar, in the middle of Mauthausen, and in the middle of Sachsenhausen ... I saw them share my pain, and it allowed me to cry again at a Holocaust memorial.

My ancestor Heinrich Sichrovsky was made a knight by emperor Franz Josef, for establishing the first railway in Austria. Jews and Muslims alike fought in the armies of the European empires as patriots for their own countries causes.

But all our collective titles, achievements, and honors meant nothing when Europe decided to massacre its minorities--on so

many occasions. It meant nothing when my Jewish grandfather was hiding from the Nazis in the toilet of a train. The only thing that made a difference was the humanity, and conscious of one German soldier when he pointed my grandfather in the right direction and said: "Run."

Human passion, empathy, and a sense of what is right and what is wrong. This knowledge has no religious borders, it has no nationality or political affiliation. And if in 10 years from now an MJC alumni somewhere in this world is in the position to decide, we will have done our part for them to do the right thing, at the right time. We are not perfect. But at the very least we have the guts to confront each other and speak, like the leaders this world needs--how difficult that may be.

Now more than ever we have to unite and toss this one drop of reason, one drop of hope, one drop of sanity, into that forest fire that is our 21st century. Strength doesn't come in size; it comes in numbers. So yes, one single drop will matter, if you just keep hurling it...day by day, together with an army of butterflies.



**MESSAGE FROM MARYAM  
MOHIUDDIN AHMED,  
CO-DIRECTOR**

Grief, the deep kind, has this uncanny way of paralyzing us. Of leaving us in a place so barren, so hopeless, we start believing we are powerless. We start thinking there is nothing in our hands. And we start taking this for granted – we start believing we ought to do nothing because we can do nothing. But as history has shown, it is not the perpetrator of violence who is the most dangerous, but in fact it is the by-stander who chooses to do nothing about it. From the Holocaust, to the genocide in Srebrenica, to the Hutus and Tutsi slaughtering one another – even those they called family.

We keep saying we'll never forget and somehow that's almost inadvertently what we repeatedly do. However, we must realize that it has been far too long that we have chosen to be paralyzed by our grief -- since we have decided to lose hope and give up our ability to act, to speak, to breathe.

No more. No more can we choose to be the living dead. Now is the time for action. The MJC is a call for action.

With a voice, loud and clear, the MJC beckons each one of us to take on one of the most difficult tasks we will ever encounter -- to act in face of injustice. But in order to act, we must learn; & in order to learn, we must listen. More than anything the MJC is an opportunity to pause and listen.

Listen. Reflect. Absorb. And then, ACT!

The MJC is an opportunity to unite, to move, to breathe – like never before! And

to do that with the knowledge that we are not doing any of this to change the world, but that we are doing it because it is the right thing to do. There's something very beautiful the Talmud says: 'Do not be daunted by the enormity of the world's grief. Do justly, now. Love mercy, now. Walk humbly, now. You are not obligated to complete the work but neither are you free to abandon it.'

The MJC is a chance for us to come together and act now – no matter how small, how insignificant we think the consequences will be. It is a living attempt to 'be the change we wish to see in the world'. I'm often asked by people all over the world what on Earth a 'Muslim Jewish Conference' is. If its making any impact at all or if its just a lot of 'koombaaya'.

Over the last 6 years, the conference has managed to bring together over 750 Muslim and Jewish youth leaders from over 50 countries to grapple with some of the most pressing problems facing both communities individually and collectively, these include battling hate speech, resolving conflict through non-violent means, living as minorities constantly facing anti-Semitism and anti-Muslim bias, issues of gender and inclusion, kosher and halal, issues that touch both communities at the deepest level including the middle east conflict.

From where I stand, let me tell you the impact the Muslim Jewish conference has had on me. This family has given me profound reasons to hope again. To know

that in the darkest of places, there will always be those who will choose to shine the light. Who will stand with me paying no heed to the color of my skin, the clothes on my body, the language that I speak, or the number of times I pray in a day – if anything, they will pay heed to the twinkle in my eyes, that silly lopsided smile on my face, the way we hold hands when we meet, the number of times I've taken a deep breath in a day.

It has also taught me to not worry about the outcome, to not be too hung up on how we will change the world or how many lives we need to impact before we reach some preset KPI and ROIs. No. It has taught me to just remember my part.

Just remember my role. Be the bird that carries singular droplets of water in its beak to quench the forest fire. And beyond that, it has reminded me, to just have faith & leave it to Him. Working with the MJC over the last 76 years reminded me to never let of 'tawakkul' – the belief that God's got our back – that He will never abandon us, that His love

transcends all love ever imaginable. And so He reminds the believers in the Quran about how He saved the first Muslims from complete annihilation,

"And [remember, O Muhammad], when those who disbelieved plotted against you to restrain you or kill you or evict you [from Makkah]. But they plan, and Allah plans. And Allah is the best of planners."

The MJC focuses on empowering young Muslim and Jewish leaders with the core values they need to make the world a better place. In an intense week-long immersive engagement, the conference reminds them to listen before they judge, and to unite before they act. It pushes them to challenge their perceived limits and open their eyes to new horizons. And beyond that, it promises them, that they will always have a home, and people to call family, no matter how rough times get – and in that, lies our greatest strength.



## THE ORGANIZATION

### About MJC

The Muslim Jewish Conference (MJC) is a grassroots dialogue and leadership organization that focuses on building sustainable networks between Muslim and Jewish leaders from around the world. The annual conference brings together students and young professionals, and invites them to step beyond the boundaries of ignorance and stereotyping in order to build a new global political movement of young Muslim and Jewish leaders, activists and experts who are committed to mutual respect. Conference participants, who belong to all faiths and affiliations, work together to develop and implement projects focused on promoting interfaith and cross cultural dialogue.

MJC has hosted seven annual conferences over the last six years in Vienna, Austria (2010, 2014); Kiev, Ukraine (2011); Bratislava, Slovakia

(2012); Sarajevo, Bosnia (2013); and Berlin, Germany (2015 & 2016). Since our first conference in 2010, we have gathered more than 750 young Jewish and Muslim leaders for dialogue, grassroots coalition building, and, most importantly, friendship. Participants have hailed from all corners of the globe: from throughout Europe, the Middle East, Central and South Asia, North and South America, and North and Sub-Saharan Africa. Over 50 countries have been represented. Although young, our participants have been at the forefront of addressing the major issues of their generation: they are directors of local and national NGOs; civil, human and women's rights activists; academics; emerging business leaders; government policymakers; humanitarian aid workers; spiritual leaders; journalists; and community leaders.



The Muslim Jewish Conference aims to grow into a Muslim Jewish Agency (MJA), organizing several conferences

## **The Vision**

Not long ago, our vision of bringing together hundreds of young Muslim and Jewish leaders from around the world to learn from each other, build long-lasting relationships and challenge the long-held misconceptions, stereotypes, and fears that have plagued our peoples was just that: *a vision*. But through the help of our generous supporters and our dynamic team of volunteers, we are proud to report that this vision has become reality for the seventh time.

As the years have passed, we have expanded our focus and have become a project incubator, working with our alumni to develop grassroots initiatives in their home communities on topics related to peace-building, improving interfaith relations, and other issues of mutual concern.

Our dual model as a dialogue platform and a project incubator has allowed us to spark transformative change extending much longer than a single week and affecting far more individuals than only those who attend our conference.

As we move into our next seven years, we continue to identify new ways to mobilize young Jewish and Muslim leaders to maximize our impact in communities around the world. The MJC will continue to host its annual interfaith gathering, strengthening its role as a respected center of expertise and a main platform of contact for Muslim-Jewish international and innovative networks of cooperation and conflict resolution, grassroots driven by the next generation of leaders, activists and entrepreneurs.

and meetings throughout the year for communities, institutions, and academics, and serving as a convener and nexus for other interfaith institutions, in order to have a long lasting impact on the ground, and to change the world as we know it.

## **Previous Conferences**

*First annual MJC | August 1-6, 2010  
Vienna, Austria*

The first MJC was held in Vienna in 2010, under the official patronage of Austrian President Heinz Fischer. Over five days, 65 participants from around the world worked together in thematic committees and conclusively produced an official declaration addressing two main social issues: combating anti-Semitism and anti-Muslim hatred, and the roles of education and media in Muslim-Jewish relations.

*Second Annual MJC | July 3-8, 2011  
Kiev, Ukraine*

The second MJC was a "call to action," where 70 participants developed concrete projects to implement in their home communities. The conference also included visits to houses of worship of both the faiths and to the site of the Nazi massacre of Jews at Babi Yar. Over the course of the five-day conference, the committees addressed anti-Semitism and anti-Muslim hatred, sustainable dialogue, and historical narratives. MJC 2011 came under the official patronage of



Russell Simmons and Rabbi Marc Schneier of the Foundation for Ethnic Understanding. Nine projects were created and are currently in different stages of implementation.

*Third Annual MJC | July 9-13, 2012  
Bratislava, Slovakia*

In 2012, 100 participants divided into four committees and developed more than ten projects which are being implemented around the world. In addition to the working committees, a separate business venture track and an arts track encouraged Muslim and Jewish participants to collaborate on specific projects throughout the week. Site visits to the houses of worship of both faiths in Bratislava were complemented by meetings with politicians in Vienna.

*Fourth Annual MJC | June 30-July 5, 2013 / Sarajevo, Bosnia-Herzegovina*

The fourth conference was held, for the predominantly Muslim country. Under the patronage of the Bosnian President Bakir Izetbegovic, 100 young delegates from 39 countries worked on joint projects to combat anti-Semitism and anti-Muslim hatred, practiced tools of conflict transformation, discussed hate speech and education and their effects on historical narratives and media, and analyzed the relationship between gender and religion. The young leaders also shared each other's pain when they stood together at the site of the Srebrenica massacre, and recited Muslim and Jewish prayers for the departed souls.

*Fifth Annual MJC | August 7-14, 2014  
Vienna, Austria*

For its 5th anniversary, the conference returned to Vienna, where it all had started, and gathered 140 leaders of the next generation under the patronage of the President of Austria, Dr. Heinz Fischer. In the midst of a summer full of hostility and hate the conflict in Israel and Palestine was discussed passionately but respectfully. Islamophobia and anti-Semitism in the Media, Rights of Religious Minorities, Historical Narratives and Identity, Gender and Religion, Art and Culture, and Conflict Transformation were all subjects of intense workshops, incubating dozens of local project ideas. Together, the participants visited a synagogue and a mosque, and traveled to the former Nazi death camp of Mauthausen to commemorate the Jews and Muslims alike who were killed there.

*Sixth Annual MJC | August 7-14, 2015  
Berlin, Germany*

Having received 340 applications – the highest ever response since the conference began six years ago, in 2015, we welcomed 120 participants and 35 team members from 45 countries. This year we have received 106 participants from 33 countries. This year was particularly powerful, given the international Syrian refugee crisis.

Timna Brauer  
Eduard Dolinsky  
Rafi Elul



## **Official Support**

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## **2016 CONFERENCE**

### **Overview**

Politically, 2016 was greeted with numerous challenges and it became apparent that this year, more than ever the Muslim Jewish Conference was needed. Between August 7-14, participants were able to delve into a myriad of topics that encompassed religiosity, philosophy, law, politics, art and culture in the heart of Berlin. Together, the participants visited the first ever concentration camp, Sachsenhausen, as well as participated in social and networking events.

### **Committees and Workshops**

*Conflict Transformation | Chaired by Dagmar Kusá and Casper van der Heijden*

This year's Conflict Transformation committee had 21 participants who were equally divided in gender and faith (Muslim, Jewish) 11/10. These participants had both diverse backgrounds as well as experiences in interfaith dialogue. The main goals of the committee were specifically centred around both theory and practical elements of conflict analysis, resolution and transformation. Both Dagmar and Casper used input from various fields to enrich the learning experience of the participants. This included insights from the fields of neurobiology, anthropology and psychology. By organising a myriad of practical simulations, participants learned the steps in the process of

mediation sessions and practiced their facilitation. Participants shared that they have learned a lot from the practical skills they learned and practiced. They were able to reflect upon their "own" community conflicts and apply the tools that were handed to them.

*Historical Narratives and Identities | Chaired by Carla Habif and Yunus Hentschel*

As suggested in the title, Historical Narratives and Identities focused and reflected upon numerous concepts and ideas surrounding identities and historical narratives. With different exercises, the participants reflected on the priority of different aspects of their own identity and tried to express the feeling of how others try to construct the own collective identity. The main priority was the immediate personal interaction within the group and the process of the group dynamic as well as with the individual perception on identity. Participants with different backgrounds and mindsets were confronted with other mindsets, personalities and narratives which definitely put their own perception in question and in the end enriched it.

*Power, Religion and Human Rights | Chaired by Amie Liebowitz, Oliver Braunschweig and Hammad Saeed*

The Power, Religion and Human Rights committee's main focus was to allow their diverse group of participants who originate from various types of countries to explore the interaction between power, religion, gender, and human rights. This was explored through looking at ideas through different perspectives and to be able to engage

with the information at hand. Tasks included the committee as a whole to “build their own State” as a Statebuilding exercise; understanding consumption habits of media; exploring customary v State laws; analysing gender and religion and its constructs and reflecting upon minorities within their State of origin. There was both individual reflection as well as transformation within groups as a whole. It was interesting to witness not only acts of individual, intrafaith and changes of the group in its entirety but also people that identified themselves as a part of a regional or ethnic group having discussion outside of religion such as those that came from the Balkan region who were given an opportunity to discuss the impact of war and conflict.

*Us and Them: Encountering Marginalization | Chaired by Asif Hussain, Denisa Nestakova and Rachel Suranyi*

Understanding identity, marginalisation as well as Anti-Semitism, Islamophobia and hate speech were the key themes within this year’s Us and Them committee. Using a range of both academic texts and practical exercises such as understanding key issues surrounding identity, exploring the idea of trust as well as personal experiences, the chair’s of this committee wanted to ensure that its participants were fully aware of the consequences of discrimination in its various forms. On one of many notable occasions, whilst discussing the topic of the “majority”, one participant described her thoughts as follows: “You never realise how accountable you are for not doing more with your privilege until you lose it”. This sentiment echoed throughout the week

as the participants continued very thought-provoking discussion. The participants in the committee continue to pass on information and write about their experiences to pass onto their communities at home.

*Art and Culture | Chaired by Eduardo Placer and Rachel Colwell*

This year’s Arts and Culture committee hailed from four different continents, and was composed of a variety of Muslims, Jews, atheists, and agnostics. The theme ‘Refuge’ was explored throughout the week and was lead through an array of artistic and creative projects and exercises. This included storytelling, singing, movement exercises, visual arts and poetry. During the Closing Ceremony of the 2016 Muslim Jewish Conference, the Arts and Culture committee shared a twenty-minute performance that pieced together all of the various artistic ideas, connections, and techniques they explored during the week. Not only did they explore refuge within their own journeys, the committee became a place of refuge for some as a particular few felt that within their daily lives they were restricted from expressing themselves through art however, found that the Muslim Jewish Conference enabled them to reinvent themselves and allow them to focus on new goals and sparked new ideas in their own creative practices. Participants have kept in contact and continue to share information about different projects that occur in their cities or interesting projects that are being developed around the World.

*Projects Development and Implementation | Chaired by Tara Dickman and Sana Khalid*

The main goals of the projects committee was to assist participants in each stage of their project's development and to allow other participants to enable change through feedback and learning from each other. The committee's week was very practical, witnessing both theory and practical activities at play. For example, whilst learning about the basics on fundraising, community organising and social entrepreneurship, they also developed skills on creating short 2 minute presentations or pitches about their projects and received feedback as well as creating posters and information briefs about their projects which inevitably highlighted the needs and challenges of their journey and projects simultaneously. The chairs have committed to speak every 2 months to their participants to ensure follow up support and feedback to help each project develop after attending the MJC.

### **Conference-Wide Programming**

#### *Visit to Sachsenhausen*

Continuing the MJC tradition of visiting sites of historical atrocities perpetrated against Jewish, Muslim, and other victims, this year the Conference visited the Sachsenhausen concentration camp in Oranienburg, Germany, the first concentration camp and the site at which the Final Solution was planned.

Taking guided tours, we learned about the history and layout of the camp, and

details about the political prisoners, Jews, Muslims, Roma, LGBTQ individuals and other people who perished there, through arbitrary executions or public hangings. Participants then engaged in silent reflection and quiet conversation. They shared personal stories and feelings, sometimes directly linked to this camp, and pondered the possibilities for, and difficulties inherent in, deriving positive lessons from such horrors. At the end of the visit, the entire conference convened at the central square— once a site of public hangings along with forms of physical and psychological torture – for a joint memorial service that included Jewish, Muslim, and secular elements. The first prayer was a Jewish prayer known as the Mourner's Kaddish, recited in Aramaic by a Jewish participant. Then Muslim team members recited Surah Fatiha from the Quran to send blessings to the victims and martyrs.

What was striking about the visit was the educational aspect for Muslims, Jews and "friends". One Hindu participant found it difficult to comprehend the atrocities that happened not so long ago and not so far away from civil society. Surely people knew about this place? As she embraced a Muslim participant who was not coping very well, they could see how this same atrocity could be applicable to them, that there were also Muslims held captive alongside the many other groups. Although we say "never again", the International community has not kept their promise and people are currently struggling to survive under dictatorships, authoritarian states and the genocides of other ethnic minorities have not ceased.

The visit was one of the most emotional and significant aspects of the conference

as many participants found peace in the fact that human suffering and capacity of commemorating is universal. To be able to congregate a group of activists that can express themselves in the future and be able to recall how they once stood in the same space is truly comforting; that maybe our voices will be heard as both individuals within our community and a group fighting for a common cause is one of the many reasons we reflect every year.

### *Dialogue on Israel-Palestine*

The Muslim Jewish Conference makes it a point to not avoid any subject, even the toughest ones. The Israeli-Palestinian conflict is of course one of them. MJC creates a space where all participants can talk about it in a way that is both authentic and respectful. Each year, after a couple of days of intense conversations on other topics, and after learning to talk to each other respectfully, we present our participants some of the most successful

examples of Israeli-Palestinian collaboration embodied by civil society organizations working across the green line. Following an interactive panel with guest speakers from those organizations, we then dedicate half a day to engage participants in a peer to peer, professionally facilitated dialogue to exchange their personal views and experiences of the conflict.

Disagreements and emotions are always welcome, for the purpose of this dialogue is not to agree on everything, nor to come up with a solution for a conflict that only belongs to its direct protagonists. The aim of this activity is simply to examine our common ways of debating about this extremely antagonistic topic, for instance on social media, and to realize that it is possible to talk constructively about it instead. This unique mix of learning from those who have a first hand experience of the conflict and open, facilitated dialogue



often allows participants to realize that the person who thinks differently is a human being nonetheless and may even become a partner. Many participants come back to their communities after the Conference and become agents of this engagement shift.

This year, MJC invited the Parents Circle – Families Forum, a very respected organization in the region to engage the participants through their personal testimonies. Joel Braunold, the Executive Director of the Alliance for Middle East Peace, a coalition of over 90 different organizations, working in every sector of society, building relationships between Jews and Arabs, Israelis and Palestinians, moderated the session.

Joel Braunold then facilitated a discussion for participants wanting to know more about the history of this conflict. Every member of that discussion appreciated the professionalism and multi partiality with which Joel narrated the various aspects and perceptions of the conflict. Rafael Tyszblat, Director of Content for MJC also facilitated a large dialogue group wanting to confront points of views, ask each other questions and eventually learn from one another. That discussion lasted over 5 hours until late in the evening. Everyone was engaged, despite sometimes harsh disagreements. The facilitator invited participants not just to learn from each others' experiences but also from the dynamics of the conversation themselves, acknowledging that it was sometimes difficult to not let one narrative dominate the conversation. That discussion got continued in smaller groups throughout the remaining days by

participants who now had the right attitude and tools to make it constructive.

### *Religious Activities and Discussions*

Throughout the week, MJC offered activities to highlight our respective communities' diverse practices. The goal was to create an atmosphere of mutual understanding, supportive of religious pluralism and gender equality. A spacious prayer room was available at all times with areas for attendees to pray together or separately.

The week began with an interactive introductory session on Judaism and Islam. Participants split into pairs to share basic religious vocabulary with one another, then reconvened for further discussion in the larger group.

Mid-way through the week, we convened a panel of two local Muslim leaders, Leyla Jagiella (*Liberal-Islamischer Bund*) and Dawood Nazirizadeh (*International Institute for Peace & Religions*), and two local Jewish leaders, Rabbi Gesa Ederberg (*Oranienburger Strasse Synagogue*) and Johannes Frank (*Ernst Ludwig Ehrlich Studienwerk and Dialogperspektiven*). In response to participants' questions, the four engaged in a fascinating conversation about opportunities and challenges for Muslim-Jewish dialogue and cooperation – in Germany and across the globe.

On Friday afternoon and evening, conference attendees participated in and observed the Jumu'ah prayer and Kabbalat Shabbat service, teaching one another about the intricacies of their respective practices. Such learning opportunities continued on Saturday with optional visits to mosques and



synagogues, and a post Shabbat Havdalah ceremony in the evening accompanied by traditional readings commencing the Jewish fast of Tisha B'Av.

### *Intra-Faith session*

For the first time, MJC 2016 voluntarily scheduled a dedicated 3 hours of time to engage participants, not in interfaith but in intrafaith discussions. Muslims gathered in 2 different groups, Jews did the same and “Friends”, the non-Muslim and non-Jewish group gathered amongst themselves as well. Each group was facilitated by several chairs from the same faith or identity group. The goal of this session was two-fold: to get their feedback on the framing of the conference as a whole and to have them reflect on their own participation. The starting question was “how is it to meet with the “Other”? On the Muslim side, participants, while initially hesitant to be critical, provided us with their valuable feedback.

One participant was apprehensive that she was not able to ask difficult questions to the Jewish participants. The facilitators provided practical and in depth advice, including the type of language to be used, when veering towards sensitive topics. Once the participants eased into the environment where they were encouraged to share their thoughts on structure of the MJC, the participants engaged each other on what kind of progress they were making; and what level of interaction they had with Jews prior to the MJC. Some participants also started discussing how their practices and beliefs regarding Islam were similar or different and how these manifested across their different backgrounds.

There was much curiosity among some to know more about different sects that exist in different regions of the same groups, particularly amongst Muslims who had come from over 30 different



countries. On the Jewish side, some participants were first suspicious about the activity's purpose: were they not trusted to say the same things amongst themselves as to the others? But quickly, it became obvious that many participants did have difficulties discussing some difficult topics. This dedicated time allowed them to acknowledge that and reflect on the best ways to address what they yet hadn't been able to address with the other. When asked how it was for them to meet each other and to meet 'the other' their responses were extremely positive. Majority stated how they had certain preconceived ideas which were broken once they came to MJC, not just about the "Other" but also about people belonging to the same religion having different cultural or regional background.

Finally, the non-Muslims or Jews group felt very much welcomed by their fellow participants. There was a sense of being equal. It was said it was very interesting to take part as a non Jew or Muslim, experiencing the debate first hand. Even in the Israel-Palestine discussions, where as a non-Jewish or Muslim individual one is often framed as the "unknown", this was not the case at MJC. It was also mentioned that it was interesting to see how *other* "others," for example the LGBT community were so easily accepted.

By the end of the session, they were all engrossed in the dialogue and had requests for another session to be held for further Intra-faith dialogue. Overall this experience proved to provoke a useful "shift" in the overall conversations, acknowledging the positive and more difficult aspects of the conference to help the discussion go even.

### ***Towards the Muslim Jewish Agency: A Global Hub for Dialogue, Projects, and Interfaith Training***

The Muslim Jewish Conference is a place for inspiration and impact, as evidenced by the scores of projects that participants come up with during the week of interaction, and further develop with our support as alumni. The new Projects Development and Implementation track helps participants realize and refine their ideas, and implement them once they return to their home countries.

The Projects committee participants worked with each other, and together with the rest of the conference, to develop joint projects and outline recommendations on how to constructively bring Muslim and Jewish communities together, dealing with key issues affecting both communities, such as anti-Semitism and anti-Muslim bigotry, the role of the media in promoting hate, and the importance of education in combating these trends.

In our fast-changing global political climate, we have observed the need for swifter action when it comes to peacekeeping and support. Therefore, the MJC core team has concluded that a formally incorporated Muslim Jewish Alliance (MJA) as an umbrella body to continue this work outside of and in addition to our annual conference is necessary. The mission of the MJA would be to foster mutually supportive relations between Jews and Muslims by encouraging dialogue between, and leadership of, a new generation of organization and movement leaders, educators, academics, dialogue facilitators, and parents committed to a more peaceful and cooperative world.

The MJA will serve as a convener and nexus for other interfaith institutions in order to have a long-lasting impact on the ground, and to change the world as we know it. Sustained year-round activity is needed to fully support and implement all alumni-led and -conceptualized projects and initiatives.

Initially, the primary activity of the MJA will involve hosting several regional cross-cultural conferences to provide young people with a more positive framework for establishing Muslim-Jewish relations, through the exchange of knowledge, ideas, and experiences as well as the development of mutually supportive courses of action. To encourage ongoing communication and contact, participants and alumni will be invited to design projects and will be actively involved in implementing these initiatives throughout the year. This work will be supported by a professional Project Development and Implementation department within the MJA.

As the organization grows, it will expand its focus, serving as a platform for connecting actions and providing educational resources to communities, institutions, academics, and the media on topics relevant to Muslim-Jewish relations. Utilizing our roster of skilled activists and experienced educators, and our established reputation as a leader in the field, we can provide guidance to new organizations working in these areas, and we can serve as networking platform for existing interfaith institutions and hub for ongoing actions. It is also crucial that our conferences continue to flourish, further solidifying the MJA's role as a leader in cross-cultural relationship-building as a foundation for these additional functions.

Of our many alumni-led endeavors around the world, the MJC would like to highlight a few of the following projects, also urging political, financial, and communal support for the following recommendations, focusing on issues connected to Muslim-Jewish relations.

## **Projects**

### *The Community*

*The Community* is a mobile phone app that gives users a tool to interact with their city, and at the same time break down the barriers which exist between the communities who live together, but remain alien to one another:

- 1) Incentivized volunteering: Users see volunteering opportunities as red "pins" on their map & earn points for taking part (*Diverse communities meet and mix through good deeds; charities receive free advertising & streamline HR*)
- 2) Local businesses: Users see locally owned businesses as green "pins" & cash in points for discounts \*Discover shops in "other" neighborhoods; small businesses receive free advertising\*
- 3) Community leaders: Veteran users put their own blue "pins" on the map, creating events that are visible & open to all.

### *Brother from Another Mother*

*Brother From Another Mother* is a Youtube channel where a Muslim YouTuber and a Jewish YouTuber will gather to discuss culture (food, clothes etc), overall general differences between the 2 communities, daily news (e.g. talk about Trump, Olympic games or

whatever is trending) and every day matters or current affairs.

The aim is to make it an open channel for dialogue and conversation in order for people to look at things and understand from multiple point of views/perspectives. Videos or Vlogs will be broadcasted each week and the discussion between the 2 Youtubers will happen via Skype.

Lee Goldfarb, also a Project Committee 2016 alumni has partnered with Yasser for this channel and he'll be the other person in the videos, which also makes this project an alumni collaboration project.

### *Institute of Jewish Muslim Action*

IJMA is a policy-action group that builds bridges between Jewish and Muslim communities by developing and coordinating cooperative efforts that protect and promote common interests in American public policy, law, and life.

IJMA is laying the groundwork for these efforts by developing relationships with Jewish and Muslim communities around

North America through its "Isaac and Ishmael in Conversation" initiative. This program will bring Jews and Muslims together at mosques, synagogues, community centers, and college campuses to explore common questions and concerns related to the construction of religious and civic identity while living as loyal minorities in non-Jewish and non-Muslim societies.

For more details about the project visit: [facebook.com/ijmaforum/](https://facebook.com/ijmaforum/)

### *Peace up The World*

Peace up is a peace-building NGO that will focus on building the concepts of peace and respect in the world.

The objective is to have a universal language with an alphabet of PEACE. The team will travel to schools and remote communities internationally to share the language of peace through dance, body language and tattoos among others.



The team will record their experiences and share them online. They will also offer free fun classes to kids and teenagers about the importance of living as global citizens.

### Origin of Eve: A Muslim-Jewish Women's Network

Origin of Eve connects professional women in the Washington D.C. area. It is a networking platform for dialogue regarding shared issues faced by religious minorities in the professional workplace, discussion on how to overcome those, and other issues facing women in the workplace.

### #NoFear Project

A project aimed at having a counterpoint to the divisive narrative of global media, especially in Europe where a coexistence has been a fact of life for over 200 years. It will be an online campaign against all kind of stereotypes, open for all, not just to talk about and share Muslim Jewish issues or news but also to share, interact and gather regarding any injustice happening anywhere in the world with any ethnicity, race, religion or gender.

### Nisa-Nisham

Nisa-Nisham is a joint Muslim Jewish Women's group. The group aims to bring the 2 communities together and promote ways in which Muslim and Jewish women can understand that their similarities are greater than their differences. They plan social events such as picnics etc through which the women gather and engage in informal dialogues.

### Muslim Jewish Forum of Detroit (MJFD)

The aim of the MJFD is of build bridges between our two communities in Detroit and to come together for social good.

MJFD is an interfaith community of young, determined, and idealistic Muslims and Jews from, or living, in the Detroit area. They are a group intent on creating change and promoting understanding between our two communities and serving our city of Detroit through local service and educational initiatives. They have been organizing events during Ramadan, Passover, and Hanukkah, along with organizing events around arts, culture, faith, and film screenings, music. The Muslim-Jewish forum also tries to meet regularly for potluck dinners at rotating locations so we keep our social bonds stronger, which allows the communities to grow closer.

### MJFinder.com

MJFinder.com is an app that connects Muslims and Jews from around the globe using location based module. The app contains information on the nearest mosques and synagogues, halal and kosher eateries, Muslim and Jewish organizations, imams, rabbis. The app also welcomes feedback from previous users.

### Responding to the Ongoing Refugee Crisis

As Europe witnessed a peak in the number of migrants and refugees crossing its borders in search of a better future, tensions also rose to unprecedented levels. But as intolerant

sentiments initially managed to get the better of many European communities, MJC alumni and team members decided to show the full meaning, and to demonstrate the true possibilities, of Muslim-Jewish collaboration. MJC affiliates worked with one another to swiftly set up a specific Facebook group to identify existing projects, and to connect people who needed help with people who wanted to help, and most crucially, to people in our communities who knew how to help. This led to multiple continuous actions in at least 6 different European countries, which included providing food, clothing, medical supplies, and shelter, as well as help with administrative orientation and basic language courses to newly-arrived individuals and families. This model of immediate, sustained interfaith collaboration can and will be replicated for similar future events.

### Connecting Actions

The Muslim Jewish Conference has recently established a partnership with several organizations, working for the past years on “active coexistence” in Europe and particularly France, focusing mostly on youth. Among them, *Coexister* joins the MJC to co-organize a French-European inter-organizational encounter, gathering members of intercultural and interreligious movements in order to exchange best practices, create common platforms, and initiate joint projects. The initial meeting took place in Paris in 2016 and was a first in a series of discussions that will be taking place in cities around Europe, with the aim of expanding and becoming inclusive over time.

### International Rapid Response Alliance

With rapid globalization, disparate communities are coming into closer contact with each other. While this presents immense opportunities for learning, it also increases the potential for friction and intolerance. Reports of hate crimes, discriminatory acts or racist events, both in Europe and around the world, are on the rise. The goal of the *International Rapid Response Alliance*, now in development, is to create an alliance of faith-based or faith-linked organizations that unequivocally and unapologetically condemn hate crimes, racism and discrimination, wherever they target people's' faiths, on a joint platform. Such a joint platform will have transparent representation, local and international legitimacy, and actively speak out against racism and bigotry of all forms.

### The History Project: Phase Two

The History Project is an innovative educational textbook and dialogue tool developed to tell dual narratives of India and Pakistan in schools. One of the co-founders of this project, Ayyaz Ahmad as well as core team member, Abdullah Leghari - are MJC alumni and team members, and are working to apply this project to a new case in the near future. They are collaborating with other MJC team members and alumni to lay the groundwork for a similar, high-quality educational book focusing on narratives in Israel and Palestine.

MJC Cookbook with Recipes From Around the World

The Muslim Jewish Conference is in the process of producing a cookbook made with recipes from around the world, written by MJC participants from different countries and cultures. Each recipe will be accompanied by the stories of how participants' families arrived at their current destination, or memories of the homes they families were forced to flee. Proceeds from sale will go to support efforts to alleviate the current refugee crises.

The Immigrant Stories Art Project

As a large and regionally-diverse community, MJC has many participants who are descendants of refugees or immigrants. The purpose of this project, now in development, is to tell those stories - through various forms of writing and art - and to highlight the message that we all come from migrant backgrounds, and should embrace those in need of a new home.



## **The Team**

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