



International Council of Christians and Jews Internationaler Rat der Christen und Juden

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PRESS RELEASE

ICCJ Pleads "Let Us Have Mercy upon Words" When Discussing Middle East

26 July 2010 - Heppenheim, Germany - The Executive Board of the International Council of Christians and Jews issued a statement today expressing alarm over an "increasing polarization in the discourse between Jews and Christians and also within each community," when it comes to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Based on reports from ICCJ members around the world, "extreme viewpoints seem to be increasing in popularity, while efforts toward moderation or compromise are rejected as disloyal or naive."

Observing that the "degree of vehemence seems to be reaching an unprecedented crescendo in many places," the statement entitled, "Let Us Have Mercy Upon Words," insists that the prevailing "no holds barred" rhetoric is particularly distressing to "an organisation committed to interreligious dialogue to promote understanding and enrichment between Jews and Christians."

The title was a frequent appeal by the late Rabbi Leon Klenicki (1930-2009), longtime interreligious director for the Anti-Defamation League. He would intervene with these words when interreligious conversations became overly heated or personalized.

The ICCJ statement illustrates its concerns by discussing reactions to a December 2009 declaration by Palestinian Christians called, "Kairos Palestine: A Moment of Truth: A word of faith, hope and love from the heart of Palestinian suffering."

The statement expresses appreciation for aspects of the Kairos Palestine document, but also lists six "serious objections or questions" about it.

However, the ICCJ stresses that its "main purpose in discussing the [Kairos] document is not to analyze its weaknesses, but to seriously engage its authors in the kind of respectful dialogue that we believe is essential for mutual respect among all religious communities, especially ones afflicted by political conflict."

The ICCJ statement sees a lack of such respectful dialogue in the reaction of some critics of Kairos Palestine, who "come across as construing any [of its] ambiguities in the most negative light, making spurious assertions that delegitimize the document."

"Unlike most of the other responses we've seen, ours, I believe, is nuanced and balanced, and does not assume the worst about others," said Dr. Deborah Weissman, president of the ICCJ. "I hope that it will contribute to advancing the dialogue rather than stifling it."

"We join all those who love the Land called holy by three interrelated religions in being impatient for the day when it truly will be a sign of interreligious cooperation and even love between the nations of Israel and Palestine," the statement concludes. "Meanwhile, let our impatience be tempered by having "mercy upon words" so that through dialogue mutual understanding may grow."

The full text of "Let Us Have Mercy Upon Words" follows.

The International Council of Christians and Jews serves as the umbrella organisation of 38 national Jewish-Christian dialogue organisations on five continents. Its member organisations world-wide over the past five decades have been successfully engaged in the historic renewal of Jewish-Christian relations. The ICCJ's efforts to promote Jewish-Christian dialogue provide models for wider interfaith relations, particularly dialogue among Jews, Christians, and Muslims. Through its annual conferences and other consultations the ICCJ offers a platform where people of different religious backgrounds examine current issues across national and religious boundaries, enabling face-to-face exchanges of experience and expertise. The international headquarters of the ICCJ are located in Heppenheim, Germany in the house where the great Jewish thinker Martin Buber lived until Nazi persecution forced him to flee Germany.