

CRIHL Mission & Goals

As religious leaders of different faiths who share a conviction in the one Creator, Lord of the Universe, we believe that the essence of religion is to worship the Almighty and respect the life and dignity of all human beings, regardless of religion, nationality and gender.

We accordingly commit ourselves to use our positions and good offices, to advance these sacred values, to prevent religion from being used as a source of conflict, and to promote mutual respect, reconciliation and a just and comprehensive peace between people of all faiths in the Holy Land and worldwide.

Goals:

- To maintain a permanent relationship and open channels of communication between the institutional religious leadership of the Holy Land.
- To sustain a close working relationship with the Government of Israel and the Palestinian National Authority, in order to encourage their efforts in bringing a just and peaceful resolution to the conflict to the Holy Land.
- To promote an environment of mutual acceptance and respect between Palestinians and Israelis, in particular between the respective faith communities, through dialogue, education and media.
- To promote respect for the holy sites of all faith communities, and to counteract any expression of disrespect, desecration or abuse of holy sites, particularly when they are exploited for violent and hostile purposes.
- To engage with religious leaders internationally and particularly in the Middle East in pursuit of an enduring peace in the Holy Land.

CRIHL Member Institutions:

The Chief Rabbinate of Israel

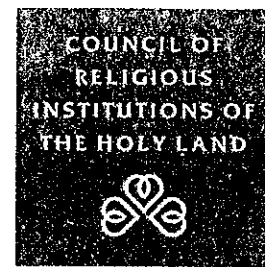
The Ministry of Waqf and Religious Affairs

The Islamic Shari'a Courts of the PA

The Heads of the Local Churches of the Holy Land:

Visit to the United States, February 26-29.2012

Message from the Council of Religious Institutions of the Holy Land



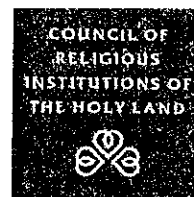
Peace in the Holy Land is a necessity – and possible. The Council of Religious Institutions of the Holy Land is united in the faith and hope that our Creator who is the source of all peace, will help us find ways to a lasting and sustainable peace between our peoples. As religious leaders we are convinced that dialogue among believers, which is a contribution to political efforts to promote peace in the Holy Land, is in itself a divine service. The Council is a visible sign that religious leaders can be part of the solution to the conflict in the Holy Land, that religious differences are not inherently an obstacle to peace.

Because it includes the most distinguished religious institutions of the Holy Land - The Chief Rabbinate of Israel, the Patriarchs and Bishops of the Churches of the Holy Land, and the Ministry of the Waqf of the Palestinian Authority - The Council of Religious Institutions of the Holy Land is unique and has a vital role to play. The Council was established in 2005 and has since then provided a space where Jewish, Christian and Muslim leaders of the Holy Land can meet in a sincere and honest dialogue on how they can contribute to peace. It has also met with local and international political and religious leaders. It has active programs to combat defamation and desecration of religion and holy sites, promote a culture of peace through education, and develop mutual understanding among emerging religious leaders. The Council demonstrates that differences can be addressed through dialogue rather than violent methods.

When visiting the United States, and meeting with political, religious and community leaders, The Council of Religious Institutions of the Holy Land calls on political leaders and international mediators to seek the advice and utilize the competence of religious leaders when faced with issues where both political and religious concerns are involved.

We include the following issues among our immediate concerns:

- Holy sites – which are numerous in the Holy Land. They need to be accessible to believers, and their integrity needs to be respected. Any act of desecration, aggression or harm against holy sites should be condemned. All believers should have safe access to the Holy Sites of their beliefs.
- Jerusalem – a holy city to believers of all three religions whose religious narratives linked to Jerusalem. All three narratives should be respected. Conflict over Jerusalem obstructs peace in the Holy Land. All around the world the faithful of all Abrahamic religions long for peace in and around the Holy City.
- Incitement – the Council has demonstrated its commitment to condemn incitement in any form through clear public statements, and will provide further leadership in this area. The Council's study on the "portrayal of the other" in Palestinian and Israeli schoolbooks is meant to help relevant authorities address curricular issues that limit understanding and respect for one other. The Council also calls for reestablishment of the joint American, Israeli and Palestinian Commission on incitement which was established in 1999, but never came into function.
- Emerging religious leaders - The Council, together with Search for Common Ground, is launching a project to prepare emerging religious leaders in order to enable them to share in our common efforts.



Recent Statements by the Council or Council members:

20 February 2012

The Council of Religious Institutions of the Holy Land condemns the acts of desecration of the Baptist Church in west Jerusalem this morning. The Council calls upon people from all faiths – Christians, Jews and Muslims – to respect all Holy Places and sites for all three religions, and strongly discourages extremists' behavior that exploits or involves religion in a political/ territorial dispute.

18 February 2012

Statement by Canon and Dr Trond Bakkevig

As Convener of the Council of Religious Institutions of the Holy Land, I was deeply distressed when I was informed that the Grand Mufti of Jerusalem quoted a Hadith in such a way that it could be understood as if he wanted Jews to be killed.

Subsequently, the Mufti stated that "Muslims believe it is forbidden to kill any human soul, regardless of religion according to Islam. (Islam) does not attack any person who is not a Muslim because we believe in all divine religions including Judaism. And Islam does not call to kill any soul or nation."

On this background I hope the Grand Mufti will publicly regret that he quoted the prophetic tradition in such a way that it could be misunderstood. I have known the Grand Mufti as a man of peace. I therefore wish he would make it clear to everybody

- that he wants a just and peaceful solution to the conflict in the Holy Land, and looks forward to the day when also Palestinians can have their national aspirations fulfilled
- that he calls on all parties to overcome the present political impasse and seek solutions through negotiations and not through the use of arms
- that he wants to live in peaceful coexistence with Jews in the Holy Land
- that he will continue to work for and promote mutual respect between Muslims, Jews and Christians

The Council of Religious Institutions of the Holy Land will continue to promote dialogue and cooperation between the distinguished Jewish, Christian and Muslim institutions represented within it. We will continue to condemn any use of religion or religious texts which incite hatred and perpetuate conflicts, and continue to denounce any desecration of religion or holy sites.

7 February 2012

The Council of Religious Institutions of the Holy Land condemns the acts of desecration and graffiti of the Greek Orthodox Monastery in Jerusalem last night. The Council calls upon people from all faiths – Christians, Jews and Muslims – to respect all Holy Places and sites for all three religions, and strongly discourages extremists' behavior that exploits or involves religious holy places in a political/territorial dispute.

11 January 2012

The Council of Religious Institutions of the Holy Land condemns the acts of desecration of the mosque in the village of Dir Istiya in the West Bank yesterday. The Council calls upon people from all faiths – Christians, Jews and Muslims – to respect all Holy Places and sites for all three religions, and strongly discourages extremists' behavior that exploits or involves religion in a political/territorial dispute.

22 December 2011

The Council of Religious Institutions of the Holy Land deplores the desecration of the synagogue in Ramle yesterday and calls on the police to do their utmost to apprehend the offenders and prevent such acts. The Council calls upon people from all faiths – Christians, Jews and Muslims – to respect all Holy Places and sites for all three religions, and combats extremism, that exploits or involves religion in the political conflict.

14 December 2011

Pursuant to acts of vandalism against holy sites, the Chief Rabbi of Israel Rabbi Shlomo Amar and the Director General of the Chief Rabbinate Mr. Oded Wiener met on December 14th with the head of the Shomron Regional Council and the rabbis of the region.

The Chief Rabbi condemned these deeds as contravening Jewish law and teaching as well as seriously harming the image, interest, and well being of the Jewish people and the State of Israel. Rabbi Amar expressed encouragement to the commanding officer and his deputy in charge of the regional IDF command to enforce the law and apprehend perpetrators of such acts.

9 September 2011

The Council of Religious Institutions of the Holy Land condemns the acts of desecration of the mosque in the village of Yatma in the northern West Bank yesterday. The Council calls upon people from all faiths – Christians, Jews and Muslims – to respect all Holy Places and sites for all three religions, and strongly discourages extremists' behaviour that exploits or involves religion in a political/territorial dispute.

5 September 2011

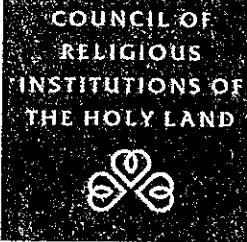
The Council of Religious Institutions of the Holy Land condemns the burning of 'Noureen' Mousuq in the village of Qusra in the West Bank this morning. The Council calls upon people from all faiths – Christians, Jews and Muslims – to respect all Holy Places and sites for all three religions, and strongly discourage extremists' behaviours to exploit or involve religion for a political/territorial dispute.

21 September 2010

The Council of the Religious Institutions of the Holy Land (CRIHL) representing the high official Israeli and Palestinian religious authorities, welcomes and supports the resumption of peace negotiations between the Israeli and Palestinian governments in the spirit of peace, justice and reconciliation.

The CRIHL wishes to thank the US administration for its ongoing efforts and reiterates the importance of respecting the religious attachments of the three religions – Jewish, Christian and Muslim – in the holy land and especially in Jerusalem. The members of the CRIHL accordingly encourage all parties to persist in this process and reaffirm the conviction that it is our shared responsibility to find the right way to live together in peace.

In accordance with the declaration of the religious leaders of the CRIHL when hosted in Washington DC, "we urge all those in positions of leadership involved in the negotiations, to seek the advice of religious leadership of our respective communities, especially on issues regarding holy sites and the holy city of Jerusalem" and "to engage religious leadership in efforts to prevent religion from being used as a source of conflict, and instead serve the goals of just and comprehensive peace and reconciliation."



Council of Religious Institutions of the Holy Land

Some notes on history

The Council of the Religious Institutions of the Holy Land was established in 2005. It is the first ever consultative body representing the highest official religious authorities in the Holy Land encompassing two peoples and three religions.

The establishment of the Council followed on from the historic meeting of religious leaders of the Holy Land that took place in Alexandria, Egypt, in 2002, initiated by the then Archbishop of Canterbury and hosted by the Grand Imam of Al Azhar. At the conclusion of the meeting the leaders issued a joint declaration calling for peace in the Holy Land and describing violence in the name of religions as the desecration of religion itself. However, most of the participants at this meeting came in their personal capacity. Accordingly, the Council was established to ensure the ongoing engagement of the leadership and representation of the official religious institutions of the Jewish, Christian and Muslim faith communities in the Holy Land.

When the Council was constituted, it agreed on a Protocol which stated the following goals:

- 1. To maintain a permanent relationship and open channels of communication between religious leaders in the Holy Land in order for them to reflect together as believers, on main issues of conflict between our peoples.*
- 2. To sustain close working relationship with the political leadership of the Government of Israel and the Palestinian National Authority, especially on issues related to the role of religion and religious communities.*
- 3. To engage with our respective communities in the Holy Land in order to promote peace and justice. The Council seeks to foster, on grassroots and national levels, an environment of mutual acceptance and respect.*
- 4. To engage with religious leaders internationally and particularly in the Middle East, in pursuit of a durable and just peace in the Holy Land.*

Since its inception, the Council has met regularly. Political circumstances have at times made meetings difficult and lead to suspension of meetings. Difficulties in obtaining permits to meet in Jerusalem, have also created problems and taken the Council to meeting places outside Jerusalem. However, even though challenging situations have threatened the very existence and future of the Council, it has managed to continue its work and even be strengthened.

The Council or individual members have met with foreign and national political leaders. In 2007 all members traveled to Washington and met with senior American religious and political leaders. Such meetings provide opportunities for raising issues of critical importance to interfaith and inter-communal relations and to demonstrate the value of interreligious cooperation in the Holy Land.

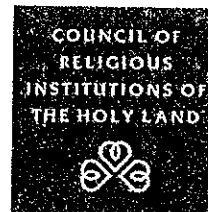
The Council issues public statements in response to events of religious significance – especially when religion or holy sites are attacked or desecrated. Members of the Council have intervened to help diffuse conflicts of religious nature in the Holy Land.

The Council will in the spring of 2012 publish results of a large study of Israeli and Palestinian schoolbooks. The study is funded by the US State Department. The Council will start a project on Holy

Sites, initiate discussions on the meaning of Jerusalem as a Holy City for all three religions, and start a program, together with Search for Common Ground, for emerging religious leaders.

The Council has a staff of two half-time employees in Jerusalem, and is working through the help and support of the Norwegian Government and the Norwegian Church. Rev. Dr. & Canon Trond Bakkevig is the facilitator and convener of the Council.

Council of Religious Institutions of the Holy Land
Israeli/Palestinian School Book Project
Funding provided by the United States Department of State
Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labor



Background and Overview: In a public statement in Washington in 2007, the Council of Religious Institutions of the Holy Land committed itself to supporting educational practices that promote mutual respect and understanding, and therefore a culture of peace. The Council's first step in providing leadership was to ask if current Israeli and Palestinian schoolbooks transmit such values. Existing studies were outdated and generally only addressed the books of one community. The Council asked Professor Bruce Wexler from Yale University to design, seek funding for and manage a scientifically rigorous, systematic and thorough study of books used in Palestinian schools in the West Bank and Gaza, and books used in Israeli State secular, State religious, and private orthodox religious schools.

Study Themes: The study focuses on how the books portray the "other", the self, the three monotheistic religions, the conflict, the prospects for peace, the land itself, the values of the other, and their own values.

Research Team: The research team is headed by Professor Sami Adwan of Bethlehem University and Professor Daniel Bar-Tal of Tel Aviv University, widely recognized experts in textbook analysis. **Professor Adwan** has received multiple international research grants. He co-authored with Dan Bar-On "*The Status of Religious Education in Palestinian Schools*" and with Ruth Firer "*The Israeli-Palestinian Conflict in History and Civics Textbooks of both Nations.*" He is a member of the Board of the International Association for Textbooks and Educational Media. **Professor Bar-Tal** has authored over 160 scientific papers, and written or edited 15 books published by major international presses. He was the 2010 recipient of the Harold Lasswell Award of the International Society of Political Psychology for lifetime contributions. His book *Stereotypes and Prejudice in Conflict* coauthored with Yona Teichman, received the 2006 Alexander George Award of the International Society of Political Psychology for the best book in Political Psychology. He has been a Visiting Professor at universities and institutes around the world. **The Research Assistants** are Israelis (4) and Palestinians (4) all fluent in Arabic and Hebrew.

The Method: Passages, poems, pictures and maps relevant to study themes are analyzed using a rating manual and forms developed by the research team. The assistants evaluate each passage, poem, etc according to highly specific criteria, and the manual and rating form give anchor points and examples to guide and standardize ratings. The research team met repeatedly to rate passages together, discuss how to apply rating guidelines, and establish inter-rater consistency. Half of the Israeli books are evaluated by an Israeli and half by a Palestinian, and the same for the Palestinian books. 25% of the books are evaluated by two raters. All analyses are done by entering ratings online, with the data going directly into a data set at Yale University. No member of the Research Team sees the results as they are adding up in the data set, so that such information will not affect subsequent ratings.

A Scientific Advisory Board consisting of world experts in text book analysis and leading Israeli and Palestinian professors was constituted to review all study methods, examine study findings, and advise the Council regarding interpretation of the results. The Board includes text book researchers from Germany who led Germany's self-examination of their text books in the decades after WW2, and U.S. scholars who have themselves analyzed school books in Israel, the Arab world, and former Yugoslavia. Israeli and Palestinians on the Board include text book scholars, social scientists and educators from across the political spectrum of both communities. The Board met with Professors Adwan and Bar-Tal and the Council in Jerusalem to review all study methods before data collection began. Through online discussions the Board has continued to review and comment upon study methods and data analytic strategies. The Board will meet with the Research Team and the Council in Jerusalem this May to review and discuss study findings prior to the Council generating its public report.

Time Table: Results will be reported at a press conference in Jerusalem in May of this year.

