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# Conference of European Rabbis Coverage Update 23<sup>rd</sup> March 2018



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# Israeli Bill Would Punish Foreign Jews Who Refuse To Divorce Their Wives

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(JTA) — The Knesset passed in a first reading draft [legislation](#) that would expose to legal action in Israel Jewish non-citizens who refuse to grant their wives a divorce.





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Pinchas Goldschmidt, president of the Conference of European Rabbis, on Wednesday celebrated as “extremely significant” the Knesset’s passing last week in a first reading of an amendment to the law on the rabbinical courts. If it passes a third reading, the bill would extend the courts’ jurisdiction to any Jew who is found to be withholding unjustly his consent to a divorce.

Led by the government and opposition lawmakers, the legislation could lead to the fining and imprisonment of Jewish tourists while in Israel and is part of an escalation in judiciary practices against recalcitrant husbands, which is occurring amid growing criticism over gender discrimination in Orthodox Judaism.

In Orthodox Judaism, a marriage cannot be undone unless the man consents to a “get” — the Hebrew word for divorce. Rabbinical courts, which in Israel function as family courts, cannot force a man to give his wife a get but they can impose harsh punishments, including jail time, on any party the judges determine are unjustly withholding a get and turning women into what is known in Judaism as agunot, or “chained” women.

But these powers in rabbinical courts run by Israel’s Chief Rabbinate are currently limited to Israeli citizens, said Goldschmidt. “The thought behind extending the jurisdiction to non-Israelis is that in today’s world, Jews, and especially observant ones, are tied to Israel. If they want to avoid legal trouble there, they will unchain their wives,” Goldschmidt, who has lobbied for the new legislation, told JTA.





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# Global Peace For Common Citizenship

By Editor - March 20, 2018

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Participants at the recent KAICIID's two-day conference in Vienna, Austria.

***The Vienna-based King Abdullah Bin Abdulaziz International Centre For Interreligious and Intercultural Dialogue, otherwise known as KAICIID Dialogue Centre, recently held a two-day High Level Meeting on 'Interreligious Dialogue for Peace: Promoting Peaceful Co-existence and Common Citizenship'. MUSA SIMON REEF, who attended the event, now reports on the highpoints of the conference.***





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The two-day summit was organised by the King Abdullah Bin Abdulaziz International Centre For Interreligious and Intercultural Dialogue. In attendance at the conference that took place from February 26 – 27, 2018, were no fewer than 100 notable world religious leaders, policy makers and experts, including Patriarch Bartholomew, Archbishop of Constantinople, Dr. Mohammad bin Abdul Karim Alissa, Secretary General, Muslim World League, Dr. Abbas Shuman, Deputy of Al-Azhar, Theodoros II of Alexandria, Pope and Patriarch of Alexandria and All Africa. The Sultan of Sokoto, Alhaji Sa’ad Abubakar III, President of the Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN), Dr Samson Ayokunle, John Cardinal Onaiyekan and Bishop Matthew Hassan Kukah were also in attendance.

Rabbi Pinchas Goldschmidt, the Chief Rabbi of Moscow, Russia, and President of the Conference of European Rabbis, Adama Dieng, the UN Secretary-General’s Special Adviser for the Prevention of Genocide, and Ahmad Alhendawi, Secretary General of the World Organization of the Scout Movement were also prominent speakers at the event.

### **KAICIID Secretary General welcomes delegates**

In his welcome address to delegates, KAICIID Secretary General Faisal Bin Muaammar recalled past efforts of the organisation at launching global peace efforts and platforms in various countries where tensions and violence have built walls of differences among followers of diverse faiths and cultures. He declared that peace can only be attained through dialogue and building bridges of understanding and deepening mutual trust.

According to him, “The unity of purpose between Christians and Muslims on vital issues, such as common citizenship cannot be ignored. Unity among religious leaders is the strongest message of hope the region has seen in many years.”

Apart from engaging relevant stakeholders in the promotion of dialogue and peace, Bin Muaammar identified religious leaders as central figures in mobilizing communities in fighting extremism and creating enabling environment for peace and promotion of dialogue.





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"Since its inception, KAICIID has taken a leading role in advocating for religious leaders and political leaders to work hand in hand to find common solutions to the challenge of violent extremism. Today, policymakers have heard us. They recognize the reality that promoting coexistence and fostering the values of common citizenship can only be achieved when religious leaders are equal stakeholders in the process," Bin Muaammar said.

At the opening of the two-day conference that coincides with KAICIID's fifth year in operation, Bin Muaammar recalled several programmes and initiatives that were carried out by the organisation. Some of the programmes included "the Fellows programme, a training programme for mid-career religious educators, and the Centre's youth initiatives, which include an ambitious programme to train religious leaders on the promotion of dialogue on social media.

"The Centre works with representatives of five major world religions, and has implemented programmes in Nigeria, the Central African Republic, the Arab region, Myanmar, and Europe, working with a wide range of international partners which include religious institutions, intergovernmental organizations such as the European Commission and the United Nations, and civil society."

### The Journey So Far

KAICIID's interventionist efforts at promoting dialogue and peace in diverse culture started with a 2014 initiative called "United Against Violence in the Name of Religion" that was hinged on uniting religious leaders against the extremist disposition of ISIS. Realising the consequences of such violent disposition, religious leaders had harped on the need "to promote dialogue through religious education, social media, and training for community leaders."

In a bid to realise the dream of the 2014 initiative that was anchored on the clarion call for religious education, KAICIID launched corresponding initiatives in the Arab region that culminated in the production of "training manual for religious leaders on social media and dialogue, the first-ever network connecting Christian and Muslim religious education institutions, and an Arab-region focus for the Fellows programme."







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Beyond engaging religious leaders in different countries, KAICIID walked a little further in collaborating with international agencies such as the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) in expanding frontiers of engagement and rallying policy makers for the attainment of dialogue and peace.

In furtherance of the objectives of attaining common citizenship as enunciated by the April 2014 initiative, the First High Level Meeting of Religious Leaders took place in Vienna in November 2014. It was at this meeting that participants launched the Vienna Declaration that resolved "to adopt dialogue as the primary and most potent for resolving conflicts and disagreement, and to support initiatives and institutions that consider dialogue the best method for constructing national peace, co-existence and promotion of common citizenship," among other objectives.

In May 2015, there was yet another meeting in Beirut and in September 2015 Athens hosted yet another High Level Meeting that culminated into the Athens Declaration that was anchored on supporting citizenship rights of Christians, Muslims and other religious and ethnic groups in the Middle East. In January 2016, KAICIID launched the Arab Region Programme aimed at promoting a united voice against violence in the name of religion.

### **Voices united against violence in the name of religion**

At the opening ceremony that took place at the Vienna's Hilton Stadtpark Hotel, several speakers, including the Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew, Archbishop of Constantinople, Dr. Mohammad bin Abdul Karim Alissa, Secretary General, Muslim World League, Mr. Nassir Abdulaziz Al-Nasser, the High Representative for the United Nations Alliance of Civilizations, and Dr. Yousef Bin Ahmad Al-Othaimeen, Secretary General, Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC), spoke on the need to close barriers and speak in unity in condemning extremist disposition of adherents of diverse cultures . The surmise of these views points to the fact that attaining peace cannot be left to politicians alone; religious and other stakeholders must be at the fulcrum of such peace efforts.





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On the concept of justice and love that are shared virtues in all religions, speakers harped on the need to speak with one voice and identify with victims of extremism across religious divide. According to Sheikh Abdul-Latif Derian, who is the Grand Mufti of Lebanon, "Extremism is a cancerous element and a deadly epidemic. If we don't kill it; it will kill all us all. Ignoring extremism does not extricate it."

The Head of the Catholicosate of the Great House of Cilicia, His Holiness Catholicos Aram I Keshishian called for deepening shared mutual trust in religions of the world. Describing violence as a phenomenon that is gradually becoming a dominant feature of contemporary society, he advocated for the strengthening of moral authority towards entrenchment of dialogue in order to terminate extremism and violence among adherents of various faiths.

Sheikh Abdullah Bin Hamid, who is the Grand Imam of Great Mosque of Mecca reminded participants that respects for rights to life in Islam is both for Muslims and non-Muslims. Calling on all religions to embrace peace, he said there is need to promote peace and understanding among believers of different faiths.

Addressing participants, Dr. Kezevino Aram, who is the Director of Shanti Ashram, said, "Those of us who are gathered here are convinced that dialogue must continue, but we must still convince our brothers and sisters of the actual impact of this dialogue. Conflicts have increased, but the desire and the hunger for peace is also expanding."

Calling on the need to promote solidarity for the common good, Bishop Miguel Ayuso, Secretary of the Pontifical Council for Inter-religious Dialogue said: "How necessary Peace and Reconciliation are in our days and in our world, so in need of promoting a "culture of dialogue", a "culture of inclusivism respectful of every human person, so as together to promote a solidarity directed towards the common good. The immense movements of refugees and migrants fleeing the horror of war shall find us united in compassion and aware of the urgency to address the present challenges."







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Metropolitan Emmanuel, Exarch of the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople, said: "As a representative of the Orthodox Church, I would like to repeat the words that His Holiness (Patriarch Bartholomew) mentioned in his address: we must have love, not only to our friends but also to our enemies, which is more difficult. And this is the basis of dialogue that is sincere, dialogue, and continuous. And this is what KAICIID has been doing."

On the part of Reverend Kosho Niwano, President-Designate Rissho Kosei-kai: "The importance of partnership between religious and political leaders has been firmly confirmed at this meeting. This partnership will have to be promoted at local, national and global levels. In so doing, I believe the most powerful tool is a methodology of dialogue. There are some forms of dialogue, namely, face to face dialogue, dialogue through media, as well as dialogue through social media."

Reverend Mark Poulson, Secretary for Inter Religious Affairs to the Archbishop of Canterbury and National Inter Religious Affairs Adviser for the Church of England declared: "Platforms and the building of them involves preparation and care, and they are only effective if they are locally relevant. We need to be intentional and look beyond the ceremonial. Platforms need to be authentic and rooted in practice."

Addressing the conference, Rabbi Rosen, who is the International Director of Interreligious Affairs, American Jewish Committee said: "Prejudice and bigotry are nurtured by ignorance and alienation. That is why this gathering is so important. That is why sincere Interreligious Dialogue does promote peace. And that is why we who have the privilege to lead KAICIID are so grateful for your presence and commitment to this path."

Sultan Abubakar III decried insincerity among politicians, just as he condemned negative profiling of persons on account of their religious beliefs, adding, "I have never heard of Christian terrorist. We should avoid using terms that tend to refer others in negative terms". He told participants that in Nigeria, NIREC, a dialogue platform for religious leaders that was promoted by the Nigerian government is set to be revived, with other policy makers involved.





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Presenting a paper at the conference, Nigeria's CAN President, Dr Ayokunle, who spoke on 'Interreligious Education And Common Citizenship Values' noted that with spread of communication technology, humanity "no longer exist in isolated societal, ethnic or religious enclaves." He called for an effective interreligious education that will not only assist in the formation of people's and religious identities," but also go a long way in shaping perception on faiths of others.

Various messages of commendation and support for KAICIID's promotion of interreligious and intercultural dialogue were received from the representatives of the Centre's Council of Parties, Dr. Michael Linhart, Secretary-General for Foreign Affairs, Republic of Austria, Dr. Nizar Madani, State Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, and Amb. Belén Alfaro, Ambassador at large for the Alliance of Civilization and the Interreligious Dialogue, Kingdom of Spain. KAICIID Board Member Bishop Miguel Ayuso, delivered a speech on behalf of Cardinal Jean-Louis Tauran President of the Pontifical Council for Inter-religious Dialogue.

### **Working groups' session**

One feature of the conference was group discussions on certain themes under topics such as social media, social cohesion and interreligious education. Some of the highlights from the working group discussions are: "All theological institutions should be either encouraged or show their interest in interreligious education and common citizenship. They should develop a religious discourse based on peace, coexistence and social cohesion.

"When seeking to promote dialogue on social media, we need to focus on building bridges and breaking the walls between communities through compassion and peaceful communication.

"Religious leaders and policymakers should actively promote the involvement of women, as well as ethnic minorities, in dialogue initiatives."





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During the conference, religious leaders, policymakers and experts in relevant fields were engaged on exploring roles of religious leaders and policymakers in promoting peace for social cohesion, common citizenship and global partnerships. The role of social media as an effective platform for dialogue attracted interest from participants. There is no doubt that the two-day event offered an opportunity for broadening peace prospects for global peace and rallying relevant stakeholders for common citizenship across diverse cultures. With the formal declaration for peace by religious leaders in the Middle East, the world is set to witness a new dawn of enhanced peace in a region known for crises and tensions.

