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Jewish and Muslim leaders meet to protect religious freedom

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Jewish and Muslim leaders from fifteen European countries gathered in Matera, southern Italy to attend a Muslim Jewish Leadership Council event focusing on the dialogue and partnership between the two communities.

The Conference of European Rabbis (CER) sent a ten-strong delegation led by Rabbi Lody van der Kamp of the Netherlands, together with rabbis from the UK, France, Switzerland, Germany, Italy and Sweden.

Shimon Cohen, Shechita UK's Campaign Director, who also serves as an adviser to the CER, was invited to join the Council to lead discussions on Shechita and Milah issues. Cohen also represents the Union of Mohelim of Europe.

Whilst recognising shared concerns, Mr Cohen urged participants to follow the Jewish community's lead and to improve training and seek regulation for practitioners in both circumcision and the religious slaughter of animals for food. 'Recognising our differences can help us help each other,' Cohen said.

During the intensive three-day meeting, during which time the rabbis, muftis and imams walked the ancient narrow streets of Matera, the Muslim Jewish Leadership



L-R: Imam Sheikh Mohammad Ismail, DL of Sheffield University; Shimon Cohen, Shechita UK; Prof. Muhammad Abu-Nimer, Muslim Jewish Leadership Council.

Council resolved to:

1. Produce background documents detailing the links between Muslim and Jewish faiths in matters of common concern, which should provide a basis for collaboration and advocacy for policy change where appropriate and necessary;
2. Form two commissions on kosher/

halal and religious freedoms, consisting of members with expertise in these fields, who can offer advice, review data and produce communications on emerging issues;

3. Conduct outreach to European institutions and seek opportunities to collaborate to protect European religious minorities.

