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Catholic lay leader wins award for fighting anti-Semitism

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A Catholic lay leader has received an award from European rabbis for fighting anti-Semitism.

Andrea Riccardi, the founder of Catholic lay association Sant'Egidio, was awarded the Moshe Rosen Award by the Conference of European Rabbis on 24 October.

The award recognises the efforts of "non-Jews who promote dialogue, understanding and tolerance to ensure a Jewish future in Europe," according to the Associated Press.

Riccardi, according to a press release from Sant'Egidio, was awarded the prize "for demonstrating a noble dedication in the promotion of coexistence between people of different cultures and religions and for promoting the development of inter-religious relations, especially the dialogue between the Catholic and Jewish communities through his work as founder of the Community of Sant'Egidio."

Founded in 1968, the Community of Sant'Egidio contains over 50,000 members working in 73 countries, serving the needy, including the poor, the elderly, immigrants, drug addicts and the mentally handicapped. In 1986, it was recognised by the Vatican as an international association of the faithful.

The Community also believes that preserving the memory of the Holocaust is critical to constructing a united Europe.

For the last 25 years, the Community has marched with the Jewish community on the anniversary of the deportation of Roman Jews to Nazi German death camps, which took place on 16 October 1943.

Sant'Egidio has also helped create a memorial to deported Jews at the Milan Central train station, and has participated in memorial walks in Antwerp, Belgium and Pecs, Hungary.

"This is a difficult moment, because nationalism is giving rise again to a politics of hatred," Riccardi told AP. "And the first chapter, not the only one, but the first chapter of political hatred is anti-Semitism."

"This must make us worry, and it should wake us up."

The Moshe Rosen award was named after a late chief rabbi of Romania who safeguarded his community during a communist regime.

The award was given just two weeks after a deadly attack in a synagogue in Halle, Germany. Presenting the award in Rome, Chief Rabbi Pinchas Goldschmit referred to the current anti-Semitic climate.

"The last survivors and the last perpetrators are about to leave our world and the Holocaust is changing from being something that is living memory to being part of history," he said.

"Certainly, it is also the political turmoil in Europe today, which is unsettling all the agreements and values which were agreed in 1945, after World War II."

Picture: Andrea Riccardi (Commons Wikimedia)



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