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STATEMENT OF THE BILATERAL COMMISSION MEETING OF THE DELEGATIONS OF THE CHIEF RABBINATE OF ISRAEL AND THE HOLY SEE'S COMMISSION FOR RELIGIOUS RELATIONS WITH THE JEWS (JERUSALEM, MARCH 29-31, 2011; ADAR II, 23-25, 5771)

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1. The Bilateral Commission of the delegations of the Chief Rabbinate of Israel and the Holy See's Commission for Religious Relations with the Jews held its tenth meeting to discuss the Challenges of Faith and Religious Leadership in Secular Society. The meeting opened with a moment of silence in memory of Chief Rabbi Yosef Azran who had been a member of the Chief Rabbinate's delegation for many years. Chief Rabbi Shear Yashuv Cohen, co-chairman of the Bilateral Commission, welcomed the participants and reaffirmed the historic nature and importance of these meetings. His counterpart Cardinal Jorge Mejía brought the greetings of the Cardinal Kurt Koch, recently appointed President of the Holy See's Commission for Religious Relations with the Jews, to the delegates. The Chief Rabbi of Israel, Rabbi Yona Metzger, graced the meeting and expressed his strong support and encouragement for the work of the Bilateral Commission, acknowledging its impact on the positive change in perceptions of Jewish-Christian relations in Israeli society.

2. Deliberations sought to define the challenges that modern secular society faces. In addition to its many benefits; rapid technological advancement, rampant consumerism, and a nihilistic ideology with an exaggerated focus on the individual at the expense of the community and collective wellbeing, have led to a moral crisis. Together with the benefits of emancipation, the last century has witnessed unparalleled violence and barbarity. Our modern world is substantially bereft of a sense of belonging, meaning and purpose.

3. Faith and religious leadership have a critical role in responding to these realities, in providing both hope and moral guidance derived from the awareness of the Divine Presence and the Divine Image in all human beings. Our respective traditions declare the importance of prayer, both as the expression of awareness of the Divine Presence, and as the way to affirm that awareness and its moral imperatives. In addition, the study of the Divine Word in Scripture offers the essential inspiration and direction for life. The Biblical description of Moses (Exodus 3:1-15) was presented as a paradigm of religious leadership who, through his encounter with God, responds to the Divine call with total faith, loving his people, declaring the Word of God without fear, embodying freedom and courage, and an authority that comes from obeying God always and unconditionally, and listening to all, ready

for dialogue.

4. The responsibility of the faithful is accordingly to testify to the Divine Presence in our world, (Isaiah 43:10) while acknowledging our failures in the past to be true and full witnesses to this charge. Such testimony is also to be seen in education, focus on youth and effective engagement of the media. Similarly, in the establishment and operation of charitable institutions with special care for the vulnerable, sick and marginalized, in the spirit of 'tikkun olam' (healing the world). In addition, the religious commitment to justice and peace also requires an engagement between religious leadership and the institutions of civil law.

5. Modern secular society has brought with it many benefits. Indeed, if secular is understood in terms of a broad-based engagement of society at large, this is likely to provide for a society in which religion can flourish. Furthermore the abovementioned focus on the individual has brought much blessing and led to an overwhelming attention to the subject of civil rights. However, in order for such a focus to be sustainable, it needs to be rooted in a higher anthropological and spiritual framework that takes into account "the common good", which finds its expression in the religious foundation of moral duties. Society's affirmation of such human duties, serves to empower and enshrine the human rights of its constituents.

6. Resulting from the discussion on the practical implications for religious leadership in relationship to current issues, the Bilateral Commission expressed the hope that the outstanding matters in the negotiations between the Holy See and the State of Israel would soon be resolved, and bilateral agreements speedily ratified for the benefit of both communities.

The Catholic delegation took the opportunity to reiterate the historic teaching of the Second Vatican Council's declaration *Nostra Aetate* (No.4) regarding the Divine Covenant with the Jewish People that "the Jews still remain most dear to God because of their Fathers, for He, does not repent of the gifts He makes, nor of the calls He issues (cf. Romans 11:28-29)"; and recalled the prayer for peace of Pope Benedict XVI when receiving the Bilateral Delegation in Rome on March 12 2009, quoting Psalm 125 "As the mountains are round about Jerusalem, so the Lord is round about His people, from this time forth and for evermore."

Jerusalem

March 31, 2011, Adar II 25, 5771

Chief Rabbi Shear Yashuv Cohen
(*Chairman of the Jewish Delegation*)

Cardinal Jorge Maria Mejía
(*Chairman of the Catholic Delegation*)

Chief Rabbi Rasson Arussi

Cardinal Peter Kodwo Turkson

Chief Rabbi David Brodman

Patriarch Fouad Twal

Chief Rabbi David Rosen

Archbishop Bruno Forte

Mr Oded Wiener

Archbishop Antonio Franco

Bishop Giacinto-Boulos Marcuzzo

Mons. Pier Francesco Fumagalli

Father Pierbattista Pizzaballa, O.F.M.

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