

The First World Congress of Imams and Rabbis for Peace held in Brussels in January 2005, had for the first time lifted the reticence of eminent representatives of Judaism and Islam to dialogue and meeting. Following this important historic event, which had opened the way to a real cooperation for peace, the Second Congress, which took place in Seville, Spain, from 19 to 22 March 2006, gave this cooperation the means to express and to develop itself. From the will expressed by all to end violence, it was necessary to progress to effective decisions and a real engagement of each and everyone in order that the role of religious leaders in the resolution of conflicts takes on greater importance and gains in scope.

The presence of an important Palestinian delegation, more significant than the one of Brussels in 2005, strongly marked the beginning of this second encounter. The political question of the Israeli-Palestinian situation was brought up at the beginning of the work programme, creating a tangible tension. The theme of the first full workshop session, 'Family and Modernity' was the occasion for the Palestinians to confront the participants with the difficulties of Palestinians in founding a family, principally due to the lack of the necessary means necessary to do so. Certain rabbis were troubled by these allusions, having the feeling that Israel was being attacked. However, these moments were revealed to be necessary, because they allowed both the freedom of speech and mutual listening. Once the suffering of each and everyone had been expressed and above all recognised, the dialogue became franker, and consequently useful.

Friendships were thus developed, notably during the pauses or during the convivial evenings with moving concerts of mixed Jewish songs and Muslim airs. The Palestinians, at the outset timid, were able to meet certain Israeli rabbis and even open the path to friendship with them. Of course their political divergences were not dissolved, but at least they had the opportunity to speak and above all listen. Many pointed out that these meetings could have never taken place in Gaza or in Israel, and certain had even taken risks to be openly seen with the representatives of the other 'side'. Many of the rabbis had also taken the engagement to implicate themselves in humanitarian and social welfare for the Palestinians. Others, beyond the immediate Israeli-Palestinian conflict, decided to invite each other to their mosques or synagogues to open their respective communities to the knowledge and respect of the other.

In the same manner, the different workshops proposed and led by the participants allowed a full and fruitful dialogue to be developed. The method used for this second congress, 'Open space', in effect allowed the participants themselves to suggest the themes that were of interest to them

and for which they could become actively engaged. A total of 141 working themes were presented, then grouped together into twenty workshops, amongst which were 'A Land for two States?', 'Racism, Islamophobia and Anti-Semitism', 'Building new generations free of all hate by proposing a Curriculum of Peace', or 'How can that which is different be respected?'. During these open workshops the discussions were often very animated, but always bearers of hope since they allowed the participants to diagnostic the points of tension and define the challenging areas in which actions should be concentrated.

Near to fifty different proposals thus merged from the working sessions, axed around three principal poles: education, with the resolve to prepare the young generations with a better knowledge of other religions, an enlightened and contextual re-examination of the revealed texts, in order to counter the use of the texts for violent ends, and lastly the engagement of religious leaders in humanitarian and social action.

New structures were also announced, amongst which the International Interreligious Observatory, which should soon come into being; it will inventory antireligious acts committed across the world and will be a platform for actions undertaken to fight all forms of racism, anti-Semitism and Islamophobia. The creation of a Committee for the Protection of Holy Sites, conceived to guard against all threats against holy sites. And lastly, a French branch of the Global Ethics Institute, which will have the objective of training students of religious seminaries to become leaders capable of guiding their communities to respect and knowledge of other confessions.

This second congress has, for men of God, for students - most of whom have met people of other confessions for the first time, for the specialists who have been able to transmit their experience, for observers, marked an important step, which through the liberty of words has returned the place and role that each one should play in order that peace be possible. All left with the certitude that something of primordial significance had taken place, and the promise not only of transmitting this experience, but also of ably participating in the realisation of the defined projects and actions.