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The 'Other' in Jewish and Catholic tradition: refugees in today's world

Vatican City, 7 April 2016 – The 23rd meeting of the International Catholic-Jewish Liaison Committee (ILC) took place in Warsaw from 4 to 7 April 2016. The ILC was created in 1971 to formalise the establishment of the official relationship between the Holy See and the worldwide Jewish community. Jewish and Catholic representatives from five continents attended the gathering. Cardinal Kurt Koch, president of the Holy See's Commission for Religious Relations with the Jews, and Martin Budd, chair of the International Jewish Committee for Interreligious Consultations, co-chaired the meeting.

The agenda of the biennial dialogue took as its theme "The 'Other' in Jewish and Catholic tradition: refugees in today's world". To provide a religious and academic basis for subsequent discussions, the sessions began with in-depth analysis of how both the Jewish and Roman Catholic traditions and sources view the "other". The presentations and discussions that followed pointed out that the respective Scriptures provide a framework for addressing pressing social issues such as the refugee crisis. Responding to religious imperatives of Christians and Jews, the conference assessed the current refugee crisis overwhelming much of Europe, recognising the tensions between the obligations of love of strangers and the dignity of their creation in God's image, with concerns for security and fear of change.

After addressing how the respective traditions encourage each one to help the other, attention focused on how the two communities now find themselves in the position of being "other". Anti-Semitism in both speech and action has resurfaced in Europe and elsewhere, and the persecution of Christians, most notably in much of the Middle East and parts of Africa, has reached levels not seen in a long time. The participants noted the obligation to raise awareness across the world regarding this problem and acknowledged the moral responsibility to be a voice for the voiceless.

In keeping with the significance of the ILC since its inception 45 years ago, the representatives reiterated their continuing commitment to open and constructive dialogue as a model for interreligious and intercultural understanding of the world, especially with religious leaders of Muslim communities.