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AMERICAN JEWISH COMMITTEE, MUSLIM WORLD LEAGUE HISTORIC JOINT VISIT TO AUSCHWITZ
January 23, 2020 – Krakow, Poland – Muslim World League (MWL) Secretary General Dr. Mohammad bin Abdulkarim Al-Issa and American Jewish Committee (AJC) CEO David Harris led today a groundbreaking joint visit of Muslims and Jews to Auschwitz, the infamous Nazi German death camp.

Al-Issa, who is based in Mecca, Saudi Arabia, led a delegation of 62 Muslims, including 25 prominent religious leaders, from some 28 countries on several continents. The mission is the most senior Islamic leadership delegation to ever visit Auschwitz or any Nazi German death camp.

The mission to Auschwitz is a key element of the Memorandum of Understanding between AJC and MWL, which was signed by Dr. Al-Issa and Mr. Harris at AJC headquarters in New York on April 30, 2019.

The visit occurred just ahead of International Holocaust Remembrance Day, which this year will mark the 75th anniversary of the liberation of the Nazi camp, where more than one million Jews were exterminated, as well as over 100,000 non-Jewish inmates, among them principally Polish Catholics, Roma, and Soviet prisoners of war.

“To be here, among the children of Holocaust survivors and members of the Jewish and Islamic communities, is both a sacred duty and a profound honor. The unconscionable crimes to which we bear witness today are truly crimes against humanity. That is to say, a violation of us all, an affront to all of God’s children,” said Dr. Al-Issa.

The AJC delegation of 24 people included AJC President Harriet Schleifer, immediate past president John Shapiro and his wife, Dr. Shonni Silverberg, and Roberta Baruch and Steven Zelkowitz, members of AJC’s Executive Council. The parents of Schleifer and Zelkowitz were Holocaust survivors.

“Visiting this sacred place, understanding what transpired at Auschwitz, is vital to preserving the memory of the Jewish, and non-Jewish, victims of the Nazis and striving to ensure that such horrors never happen again,” said Harris, the son of Holocaust survivors. “We are deeply moved to be the hosts for such an unprecedented visit. This creates the chance not only to deepen understanding of the unparalleled crime that took place here, but also to build bridges of friendship and cooperation between Muslims and Jews in pursuit of a more humane and safer world for all.”

Each member of the Muslim and Jewish delegations carried a memorial candle and placed it at the monument honoring the more than 1.1 million people murdered at the Nazi camp.

Following the ceremony and memorial prayers for the dead, Dr. Al-Issa offered remarks in which he said, “By paying tribute to the victims of the Holocaust, we not only honor the dead but celebrate the living. Throughout the visit, stories of our shared humanity showed through the horror. I was amazed by stories of some individual Muslims who sought to save Jews from the Holocaust at great personal risk in Europe and North Africa. These precious men and women represent the true values of Islam. And today’s visit by the AJC and MWL is made in the spirit of this noble tradition of brotherhood, peace, and love.”
The MWL and AJC delegations will continue their joint mission in Warsaw tomorrow. They will visit the POLIN Museum of the History of Polish Jews, meet with the Muslim community of Warsaw and attend a prayer service, participate in a special program at the Nozyk Synagogue, and join together for an interfaith Shabbat dinner at the Royal Castle in Warsaw.

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