

Welby joins faith leaders in denouncing the rise of anti-Semitism at the 80th anniversary of Wannsee conference in Berlin

Senior faith leaders from around the world will speak out against the current rise of antisemitism at a unique one-day symposium in Berlin on Wednesday, January 19th, culminating in a special memorial event in the historical Französischer Dom on the eve of the **80th anniversary of the Wannsee conference**. It was in Wannsee, just outside of Berlin, eighty years ago, where fifteen senior Nazi and German government officials came together to plan and coordinate the implementation of the Final Solution to the Jewish Question, in other words, the eradication of all the Jews in Europe.

“But the tragedy at Wannsee did not start with the Wannsee conference in 1942”, explains symposium organiser Tomas Sandell of the European Coalition for Israel. “Without a supportive belief system and deeply rooted antisemitic sentiments in the German culture at the time, there could not have been a Holocaust.”

To explore what faith leaders can learn from this tragedy and how they can prevent similar developments from happening today, ECI has invited senior church leaders to Berlin for a one-day consultation.

At the symposium, statements will be given by the Archbishop of Canterbury, Justin Welby, the Secretary-General of the World Evangelical Alliance, Dr Thomas Schirmmacher, and the Chair of the Pentecostal Commission on Religious Liberty, Dr Arto Hämmäläinen, just to name a few. Participants will also hear from leading experts on antisemitism, including the EU Coordinator in combating antisemitism, Katharina von Schnurbein, the Federal Commissioner for Jewish life in Germany and the fight against antisemitism, Dr Felix Klein, and the Deputy Ambassador of Israel to Germany, Aaron Sagui.

Senior Jewish leaders, such as the President of the European Conference of Rabbis, Chief Rabbi of Moscow, Pinchas Goldschmidt, the Associate Executive Vice-President and General Counsel of the World Jewish Congress, Menachem Rosensaft, and the Associate Dean of the Simon Wiesenthal Center, Rabbi Abraham Cooper, will provide Jewish perspectives.

“Antisemitism cannot be defeated at a one-day symposium, but this event can become a catalyst for greater understanding and determination as well as better coordination and cooperation among global faith leaders to take on the fight against this deadly virus”, says Sandell.

The symposium is a joint venture between the European Coalition for Israel and the Evangelical-Protestant Church of Germany (EKD). The church in Germany has a long history

of dealing with the collective guilt of the Holocaust, forgiveness and reconciliation. On Wednesday night the Vice-President of the newly elected parliament, Katrin Göring-Eckardt, a trained theologian, will speak alongside the Bishop of the Evangelical-Protestant Church of Berlin, Dr Christian Stäblein, who completed part of his academic studies at the Hebrew university in Jerusalem.

“Whilst the deadly threats to Jews in the 1940s were limited to those in Nazi-occupied Europe, today antisemitism is raising its ugly head also in the United States”, notes Sandell who is seriously concerned about the changing attitudes within the United States which he calls “the next battle ground in the combat against antisemitism”.

The U.S. will be represented at the symposium by Reverend Johnnie Moore, a former commissioner in the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom and a recipient of the prestigious Medal of Valor from the Simon Wiesenthal Centre in acknowledgement of his advocacy on behalf of persecuted minorities in the Middle East.

“Now is the time for political and religious leaders all around the world to draw a line in the sand to say ‘no’ to the dramatic rise in antisemitism around the world, to declare ‘not on our watch’”, says Rev.

Moore who is also the President of the Congress of Christian Leaders.

“Unfortunately, just days ago outside of Dallas, Texas, we were reminded yet again of the tragic necessity of this meeting.”

The symposium will be followed by an official visit to the Wannsee Museum the next day, January 20th, which is the 80th anniversary of the Wannsee conference.