

Joint statement of Jews and Catholics on end-of-life issues

12 May 2023

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Joint Statement of the Bilateral Commission of the Delegations of the Chief Rabbinate of Israel and the Holy See's Commission for Religious Relations with the Jews, 12.05.2023

From 2 to 4 May, the seventeenth meeting of the Bilateral Commission of the Delegations of the Chief Rabbinate of Israel and the Holy See's Commission for Religious Relations with the Jews took place in Jerusalem, on the theme: *Jewish and Catholic approaches to the terminally ill: the Prohibited, the Permitted and the Obligatory*.

The following is the full text of the Joint Statement signed by both Parties:

17th Bilateral Commission Meeting of the Delegations of the Chief Rabbinate of Israel and the Holy See's Commission for Religious Relations with the Jews

*Jewish and Catholic Approaches to the terminally ill:
The Prohibited, the Permitted and the Obligatory*

(Jerusalem, May 2-4, 2023; Iyar 11-13, 5783)

Joint Statement

1. At the opening reception, Chief Rabbi Arussi welcomed the delegations, and noted that due to the Covid epidemic, the Bilateral Commission meetings had not taken place for five years, and thus expressed particular joy at this reunion. The delegations wished Rabbi Arussi a speedy recovery from his indisposition and a return to full health. Mr. Yehudah Cohen, the newly appointed Director-General of the Chief Rabbinate of Israel added his welcome, and expressed his admiration for the work of the Bilateral Commission, and its importance for society at large.
2. Deliberations commenced the next morning, expanding upon the 6th meeting of the Bilateral Commission that had addressed the subject of human life and technology, in light of the far-reaching advances in medical science.
3. The Catholic presentation highlighted the guiding principles regarding the treatment of the terminally ill, opening with Pope Francis' caution regarding "the contemporary socio-cultural context progressively eroding the understanding of that which makes human life precious."
4. Thus, the dignity of every human being, which for Jews and Catholics flows from the religious affirmation of the sanctity of human life, was reaffirmed in accordance with the Bilateral Commission's declaration issued in Rome in February 2006 – Shevat 5766: "We affirm the principles of our respective Traditions that God is the Creator and Lord of all life and that human life is sacred precisely because, as the Bible teaches, the human person is created in the Divine Image (cfr. *Gen* 1:26-27). Because life is a Divine gift to be respected and preserved, we perforce reject the idea of human ownership of life and of the right of any human party to decide its value or extent. Thus we repudiate the concept of active euthanasia (so-called mercy killing) and physician-assisted suicide, as the illegitimate human arrogation of an exclusive Divine authority to determine the time of a person's death." Furthermore, "In this regard, we reiterate the teachings of our heritages that all human knowledge and capacities must serve and promote human life and dignity and thus be in harmony with the moral values that emanate from the aforementioned principles. Accordingly, there must be limits to the application of science and technology in recognition of the fact that not everything which is technically feasible is ethical."
5. Special emphasis was placed on the importance of compassionate palliative care and maximal effort to alleviate pain and suffering. Further reference was made to the historic joint declaration of the three Abrahamic Religions rejecting active euthanasia and physician-assisted suicide, and promoting palliative care, issued at the Vatican on October 28, 2019 – 29 Tishrei 5780.
6. For both Jews and Christians, taking care of the terminally ill with belief, respect and love means truly to light the lamp of faith and hope at a time shrouded in darkness and a sense of solitude and abandonment for both patient and dear ones.

7. The second session was about the guidelines regarding the terminally ill as legislated in harmony with Jewish tradition and their global ramifications. Distinctions were highlighted between actions that hasten death, and actions of omission beyond the provision of basic human needs; hence active euthanasia and physician-assisted suicide and withdrawing continuous medical treatment (e.g. ventilator or pacemaker) and the withdrawal of life-prolonging medical treatments beyond basic human needs (e.g. dialysis, chemotherapy).

8. The delegations recognize that the ethical and religious complexities involved in end-of-life situations, require that each situation be addressed according to its particular circumstances and needs.

9. The delegations were welcomed by the Director-General of Shaarei Zedek Medical Center, where they witnessed the treatment of the terminally ill in accordance with the above-mentioned principles.

10. The members of the delegation gave thanks to God the Creator, asking for His blessing upon all who are sick, and all who are engaged in healing and preservation of life.

Jerusalem,

May 4, 2023 – Iyar 13, 5783

Rabbi Rasson Arussi
(Chairman of the Jewish Delegation)

Cardinal Kurt Koch
(Chairman of the Catholic Delegation)

Rabbi Eliezer Simha Weisz

Archbishop Pierbattista Pizzaballa O.F.M.

Rabbi Prof. Avraham Steinberg

Archbishop Adolfo Tito Yllana

Rabbi David Rosen

Archbishop Bruno Forte

Rabbi Gidon Shlush

Bishop Giacinto-Boulos Marcuzzo

Mr. Yehudah Cohen

Msgr. Pier Francesco Fumagalli

Mr. Oded Wiener

Fr. Norbert J. Hofmann S.D.B.