

## Morocco's Culture of Religious Tolerance and Engagement with the Jewish Community

- Morocco has a rich history of religious tolerance that was most recently illustrated with the renovations of the Casablanca Museum of Moroccan Judaism and the Slat al Fassayine Synagogue in Fez in early 2013 in order to preserve Jewish history in Morocco. In April 2013, the Casablanca-based Museum of Moroccan Judaism, the only institution of its kind in the Arab world, was reopened to the public. The museum displays photos of synagogues from across the kingdom, Torah scrolls and Chanukah lamps, gold embroidered caftans, jewels, ancient rugs and objects of Jewish-Moroccan cultural heritage. In February 2013, the 17<sup>th</sup> century Slat al Fassayine Synagogue was similar reopened after two years of restoration.  
<http://me-confidential.com/7046-casablanca-museum-of-moroccan-judaism-renovated.html>
- These events are part of a large scale project to refurbish synagogues and other Jewish monuments in order to preserve the unique and historic aspects of Moroccan culture. In a message for the inauguration ceremony of the Slat al Fassiyine synagogue in Fez, King Mohammed VI reiterated his commitment to religious freedom and spiritual diversity, and emphasized the importance of the three-thousand-year-old Jewish legacy in Morocco. “As Commander of the Faithful,” the King said, “I am committed to defending the faith and the community of believers, and to fulfilling my mission with respect to upholding freedom of religion for all believers in the revealed religions, including Judaism, whose followers are loyal citizens for whom I deeply care... The Moroccan people’s cultural traditions, which are steeped in history, are rooted in our citizens’ abiding commitment to the principles of coexistence, tolerance and harmony between the various components of the nation.”  
<http://moroccoonthemove.wordpress.com/press-releases/press-release-moroccos-king-mohammed-vi-commends/>
- Morocco’s commitment to its Jewish heritage and its cultural of tolerance has been widely recognized. At the International Day in Memory of the Victims of the Holocaust held at the United Nations on January 27, 2010. Morocco’s tolerance of Jews and its resistance to anti-Semitic policies during World War II were highlighted as part of a series of events held at the UN to commemorate the victims of the Holocaust. In a message for the event, King Mohammed VI noted that Morocco’s experience with Jews provides important lessons for the present, particularly with regard to the conflict in the Middle East. Remembering the Holocaust “strongly imposes ethical, moral and political standards which will, tomorrow, be the true guarantors of this peace – based on equally-shared justice and dignity – and for which most Palestinians and Israelis yearn,” he underscored.  
<http://www.un.org/apps/news/story.asp?NewsID=33609&Cr=holocaust&Cr1>
- In October 2009, the International Raoul Wallenberg Foundation awarded Morocco the Raoul Wallenberg Humanitarian Award for its role in saving “the lives of Jews during the Second World War...and for the blessed role that it has traditionally played in favor of the dialogue and mutual respect between all creeds, religions and nations.”  
<http://www.raoulwallenberg.net/?en/press/tribute-kingdom-morocco.6018.htm>

This information has been produced by the Moroccan American Center for Policy (MACP). [www.moroccoonthemove.com](http://www.moroccoonthemove.com)

MACP is a registered agent of the Government of Morocco.

Additional information is available at the Justice Department in Washington, D.C.

- The Conference of Jewish Presidents has praised King Mohammed VI for his leadership in speaking out against the Holocaust and his endorsement of the Paris-based Aladdin Project, which aims to spread awareness of the genocide among Muslims. The leadership of the Conference lauded the King, noting, "...this courageous act by His Majesty King Mohammed VI to recognize the historical truth and universal significance of the Holocaust and the need to educate the Arab and Moslem world about its impact on mankind is especially remarkable. We hope that the King's endorsement of this important initiative will encourage others to do the same." The Jewish leaders added that this same advocacy of tolerance has been in evidence in His Majesty's treatment of the Jewish community of Morocco, which boasts a 2,000-year history in the country.

<http://www.conferenceofpresidents.org/pressrelease.asp?ArtCat=1&ArtId=166>
- In a speech launching the Aladdin Project for intercultural dialogue, King Mohammed VI formally acknowledged the Holocaust, stating that the genocide was "one of the most tragic chapters of modern history." The King's speech in March 2009 was the first time an Arab state had taken such a clear stance on the Holocaust.

[http://www.map.ma/eng/sections/royal\\_activities/king\\_addresses\\_parti/view](http://www.map.ma/eng/sections/royal_activities/king_addresses_parti/view)
- The King has also taken great lengths to recognize the achievements of Moroccan Jews. On the occasion of his 9<sup>th</sup> anniversary as King in 2008, Mohammed VI decorated a former Israeli ambassador to France, and several other Jewish personalities of Moroccan origin. Yehuda Lancry, Israel's Moroccan-born ambassador in Paris between 1992 and 1995, David Messas, Paris's chief rabbi born in Meknes, and Dominique Strauss-Kahn, currently director general of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) in Washington, who spent his youth in Morocco which he left in the early sixties, were all recognized by the King.

<http://www.ejpress.org/article/28995>
- On October 10, 2007, Georges Berdugo, an elderly Jewish lawyer was given a royal lifetime achievement award for his service to Morocco as a community leader and the king's ambassador at large. During the ceremony, a rabbi recited a prayer for the Muslim king, an act unheard in most parts of the world. "But it is almost routine here in this North African country, where Jews are proud not only of their rich cultural heritage but also of embodying a rare example of Jewish-Muslim coexistence. In addition to a vibrant Jewish community with several synagogues and schools, Moroccan Jewry can boast of a royal adviser, an ambassador-at-large, candidates for parliament and even a smattering of far-left militants."

<http://www.forward.com/articles/11792/>
- Within the country, Morocco has encouraged Moroccans of Jewish descent to play a role in Moroccan politics. Today, Serge Berdugo and Andre Azoulay, prominent members of Morocco's Jewish community, serve as Ambassador at large and Counselor to King Mohammed VI, respectively. Ambassador Berdugo is also the elected President of the World Organization of the Moroccan Jewry.

<http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/irf/2002/14008.htm>
- Five Moroccan Jews ran for office in Morocco's September 2007 Parliamentary elections. Although none of the candidates won a seat in Parliament, they represented a record number

of Jewish candidates and they made their presence felt during the campaign. Citing a desire to run based on feelings of patriotism and a sense of belonging to Morocco, the candidates were well-received by the largely Muslim populace. “The Moroccan government, for its part, has embraced those who remained, and its support of the community has been held up as a symbol of Arab moderation and tolerance.”

<http://forward.com/articles/11607/>

- These recent expressions of tolerance build on a long tradition. In contrast to other parts of North Africa or even Europe, Morocco is internationally recognized for the peaceful coexistence enjoyed by Jews and Muslims within its communities. Indicatively, there were no uprisings or attacks against the Jewish population in Morocco during the 1967 Six-Day War, as in other North African countries.

<http://jta.org/news/article/1999/03/25/3750/AROUNDTHEJEWISHWO>

- During World War II, the Late King Mohammed V famously rejected an appeal by the French Vichy regime to gather up Moroccan Jews for deportation. In response to this demand, it is reported that the King stated: “we have no Jews in Morocco, only Moroccans.”

<http://www.csmonitor.com/2007/0109/p09s01-coop.html>

<http://www.raoulwallenberg.net/?en/press/tribute-kingdom-morocco.6018.htm>

- The Jewish community of Morocco has historical ties to the Maghreb region dating back more than 2,000 years, with approximately 270,000 Jews having lived in Morocco until the late 1940s, when many immigrated to Israel.

<http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/5431.htm>

<http://jta.org/news/article/1999/03/25/3750/AROUNDTHEJEWISHWO>

## **Relations with Israel and the Jewish Community Worldwide**

- Israel's relations with Morocco have historically been friendlier than with any other Arab country as Morocco continues to be the most tolerant environment for Jews in the Arab world. There are currently approximately 3000 Jews living in Morocco, as well as 30 active synagogues, and 3 Jewish school networks.

[http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle\\_east/3202767.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle_east/3202767.stm)

<http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/anti-semitism/morocjews.html>

- The coastal town of Safi, home to the shrine of Rabbi Abraham Ben Zmirro, remains a pilgrimage site for a large number of Jews from around the world. “While religious tensions flare in Jerusalem and beyond, in Morocco, Jews and Muslims say they nurture a legacy of tolerance and maintain common sanctuaries where adherents of both religions pray. Decades of emigration to Israel by Morocco's Jews and terrorist bombings in Casablanca that targeted Jewish sites haven't diminished the draw of these annual pilgrimages.” Once home to some 300,000 Jews, Morocco hosts the Arab world's only Jewish museum, funds Jewish institutions and frequently holds events to celebrate Judeo-Moroccan heritage.

<http://www.wwrn.org/article.php?idd=29006&sec=35&cont=3>

- Jews and Muslims from around the Mediterranean also gather annually for the Atlantic Andalusia Festival in Essaouira, an event that celebrates the multi-religious heritage of Andalusia and Morocco. Organized by the Three Cultures of the Mediterranean Foundation and the Essaouira Mogador Foundation, both of which are presided over by André Azoulay, a senior advisor to King Mohammed VI and one of the country's most influential Jews, the annual festival helps address Moroccan history and re-contextualize the immense influence Jews have had on the Moroccan character. At the most recent festival in November 2010, many participants were joyous, talking about Jewish-Muslim co-existence and exalting Morocco for being the only country in North Africa where they felt they could have such a festival.

[http://www.magharebia.com/cocoon/awi/xhtml1/en\\_GB/features/awi/reportage/2010/11/05/reportage-01](http://www.magharebia.com/cocoon/awi/xhtml1/en_GB/features/awi/reportage/2010/11/05/reportage-01)

- Morocco has also been politically engaged with Israel. In October 2010, Knesset Speaker Reuven Rivlin attended the Parliamentary Assembly of the Mediterranean in Rabat, Morocco. Rivlin was joined by Knesset Member Majalli Whbee (Kadima), the Knesset's representative in the organization. During the visit, Rivlin met with representatives of the Jewish communities in Rabat and Casablanca.

<http://www.ynetnews.com/articles/0,7340,L-3974831,00.html>

- In June 2009, Moroccan Director General of Bilateral Affairs Mohammed Azaroual received the Representative for North Africa from the Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Rabat. They discussed bilateral issues, with Azaroual underscoring that Morocco has worked consistently for peace in the region. This meeting came just weeks after Morocco and Israel re-launched their diplomatic relationship. Taking advantage of Israeli participation in a seminar in Rabat on the Global Initiative to Combat Nuclear Terrorism, the two nations sought to restore relations following some tension over military action in Gaza in December 2008 and January 2009.

- These visits built upon previous meetings between Israeli and Moroccan government officials. In August 2008, Israeli Foreign Ministry Director General Aharon Abramovitz visited Morocco to meet with his Moroccan counterpart, Taib Fassi Fihri in an effort to organize the first visit of an Israeli Foreign Minister to the North African country since 2003. Also there to take part in a conference on European-Mediterranean relations, Abramovitz told Fihri that "Israel expects the Arab countries to support the diplomatic process with the Palestinians by strengthening ties with Israel." Also in 2008, former foreign Minister Tzipi Livni met with Fihri in Brussels, during a meeting of NATO foreign ministers. These mark the most recent diplomatic overtures between Israel and Morocco, which were severely limited following the outbreak of the second intifada in September 2000. Nevertheless, talks between the two countries have continued.

<http://www.haaretz.com/hasen/spages/1044410.html>

- The foreign ministers of Israel and Morocco convened their first "publicly disclosed" meeting in a number of years in Paris, on the 4<sup>th</sup> of July 2007. The talks focused on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Following the meeting, [former] Israeli Foreign Affairs Minister, Tzipi Livni, stated: "We (Israel and moderate Arab countries, including Morocco) have the same

concerns, we face the same threats, and so we want to see a process in place so we can move forward."

<http://www.reuters.com/article/worldNews/idUSL041502520070704>

- King Mohammed VI reiterated his solidarity with and protection of all Moroccan Jews, as well as his support for Israel, in response to the 2003 terrorist strikes against Jewish targets in Casablanca. That summer, at his Tangier palace, King Mohammed arranged a highly-publicized event for Israel's new Grand Rabbi, Shlomo Moshe Amar, a native of Casablanca.<sup>1</sup>
- The Late King Hassan II and current King Mohammed VI have repeatedly served as President of the Islamic Conference's Jerusalem Committee, a role in which King Mohammed VI consistently asserts his stance that Jerusalem should be shared by Muslims, Christians, and Jews, with East Jerusalem serving as the capital of a sovereign Palestinian state.
- From 1994-1999, the Late King Hassan II collaborated with David Levy, Israeli Foreign Minister of Moroccan origin. Following the signing of the Oslo Peace Accords, Israeli Minister of Defense Yitzhak Rabin publicly honored King Hassan for the part that he played in the Middle East Peace Process. Following the enactment of the accords, Morocco increased its economic and political liaisons with Israel, thus solidifying diplomatic ties. In 1994, Rabat and Tel Aviv established liaison offices which served as unofficial embassies.  
<http://www.jweekly.com/article/full/11280/moroccan-jews-mourn-the-passing-of-king-hassan-ii/>  
[http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle\\_east/333725.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle_east/333725.stm)
- Moroccan-Israeli economic relations were bolstered by the 1994 Middle East/North Africa Economic Summit in Casablanca, to which King Hassan II invited the representatives of 61 countries and 1,114 global business leaders. Following the conference, the Casablanca Declaration was signed to support the newly-established peace process, leading to the inauguration of the Economic Summit Executive Secretariat in Rabat, which works to further public-private partnership, support contact, share data, and encourage private sector investment in the region.  
<http://www.mfa.gov.il/MFA/Peace%20Process/Guide%20to%20the%20Peace%20Process/Regional%20Economic%20Development%20Working%20Group>

For more information, visit <http://www.moroccoonthemove.com> - Follow on Twitter [@MorocOnTheMove](https://twitter.com/MorocOnTheMove)

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<sup>1</sup> Howe, Marvin. *Morocco: The Islamist Awakening and Other Challenges*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2005, p. 125.