

# ECI co-hosts first ever Tashlikh ceremony at the UN

## Time to honour the Jewish people and their culture

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(In the picture, from left to right: Rabbi Arthur Schneier, UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon, Permanent Representative of Israel to the UN, Ambassador Ron Prozor, ECI Director for UN Affairs, Gregory Lafitte and ECI Founding Director Tomas Sandell.)

UN Secretary-General **Ban Ki-moon**, together with other top UN officials and senior diplomats from some 50 nations, have gathered at the UN Rose garden in New York to celebrate the Jewish New Year *Rosh Hashanah* and prepare for the Jewish holiday of *Yom Kippur*. The unique event was hosted by the Israeli Mission to the UN and the Forum for Cultural Diplomacy, which is a European Coalition for Israel initiative to the UN.

In accordance with the ancient Jewish custom of *Tashlikh*, invited guests, led by Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon threw breadcrumbs into the East River, as a symbol of the tossing away of one's sin in order to start the new year on a clean slate. The event was the first of its kind to be held at the UN and it took place only two days before *Yom Kippur* and at the beginning of the 70<sup>th</sup> session of the UN General Assembly.

Senior Rabbi **Arthur Schneier** of the Park East Synagogue, who led the religious ceremony, saw the event as an answer to many years of prayer as the UN officially acknowledged the

importance of *Yom Kippur* as the holiest day in the Jewish calendar and its universal relevance to the UN institutions.

ECI Director for UN Affairs, **Gregory Lafitte** reminded the audience of the centrality of Jewish thinking in the creation of the UN and its vision of world peace which is visibly displayed on the so-called Isaiah wall across from the UN headquarters in New York. The monument records the famous verse from the book of Isaiah, chapter 2, which talks about a time when "swords will be turned into ploughshares." Speaking about the rise of anti-Semitism in Europe, he said, "Tolerance is not the answer. It is not merely enough to 'tolerate' the Jewish people but we need to honour and celebrate their culture and many contributions to mankind." Lafitte ended his speech by offering the prayer of Avinu Malkeinu, which is traditionally sung on each of the first days of the year leading to *Yom Kippur*.

Outgoing Permanent Representative of Israel to the UN, Ambassador **Ron Prozor**, expressed, in one of his last speeches at the UN, his genuine desire to see the UN achieve its goal to become a temple of peace and a bastion of freedom by the casting away of hatred and apathy in order to make the world a better place.

The official speeches were followed by a unique ceremony of *Tashlikh* where UN officials and diplomats, led by Rabbi Schneier and Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon tossed breadcrumbs in to the East river, as a symbol casting away our sins.

Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon was duly honoured by the organisers for having recognized the importance of *Yom Kippur* and for having personally attended this first ever *Tashlikh* ceremony, which

is traditionally held in connection with the Jewish New Year, *Rosh Hashanah*, which this year fell on September 14.

The evening was part of a campaign to make *Yom Kippur* a UN holiday which has gained the support of over 60 nations. This year, there will be no UN activities on the day of *Yom Kippur*, which falls on Wednesday 23 September, one day before the Muslim holiday of *Eid al Adha* which already is a UN holiday.

The European Coalition for Israel has been campaigning for UN recognition of *Yom Kippur* for the last two years. In a statement on Tuesday, Israeli Deputy Permanent Representative to the UN, Ambassador **David Roet** thanked ECI for its support for these efforts throughout the years.

The evening was led by ECI Founding Director **Tomas Sandell** and Rabbi Arthur Schneier. In his closing remarks Sandell noted that “the message of *Yom Kippur*, forgiveness and reconciliation, are values that we must continue to build on—as friends of the Jewish culture.”



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