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**Press Releases**

**French Muslim Leaders Visit Israel with AJC France, Project Interchange**

December 19, 2008 – Jerusalem – A group of French Muslim leaders have completed a five-day visit to Israel under the auspices of the American Jewish Committee.

“We were delighted to facilitate the first visit to Israel of Muslim civic leaders from France,” said Valerie Hoffenberg, director of AJC France, who led the delegation.

“The intensive series of meetings and experiences around the country was an eye-opening experience that will have lasting impact in advancing Jewish-Muslim relations in France and deepening understanding of Israel,” said Hoffenberg.

The ground-breaking trip took place in coordination with Project Interchange, a Washington-based AJC institute dedicated to providing educational seminars in Israel for America’s political, civic, ethnic and religious leaders. In recent years, Project Interchange has expanded its programming to include leadership groups from Europe, Asia, Latin America, and Africa.

Together with the AJC office in Paris, PI has coordinated seminars in Israel for delegations of French parliamentarians, elite university students, and journalists. This was the first seminar dedicated to introducing Israel to French Muslim leaders.

The 15 participants in this week’s program included a police commissioner, the president of the French Young Entrepreneurs group, and the general director of a French television and radio station.

The group met privately with Israeli President Shimon Peres. The trip included visits to Jewish, Muslim and Christian holy sites in Jerusalem, and a visit to Yad Vashem. The delegation also visited Ramallah and Bethlehem, and met with Palestinian Authority officials, including President Mahmoud Abbas.

“French Muslim leaders were able to confront their perceptions of Israel with the reality, and gain a deeper understanding of why French Jews are so supportive of Israel,” Hoffenberg said.

Also accompanying the delegation was the diplomatic adviser on Middle East and North African affairs for French President Nicolas Sarkozy.

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