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Jewish community leaders from Latin America received in audience by Pope Benedict XVI

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Latin American Jewish Congress praises Pope's role in fostering mutual understanding and peace
ROME – Led by Latin American Jewish Congress (LAJC) President Jack Terpins, Jewish community leaders from 12 Latin American countries were today received in private audience by Pope Benedict XVI. Terpins underlined that the relationship between Jews and Catholics in the region was “an example not only of positive coexistence, but of friendship and cooperation.” Also present at the meeting – the first of its kind - were World Jewish Congress (WJC) President Ronald S. Lauder, who had previously met the Catholic pontiff in 2007 and 2010, WJC Secretary General Dan Diker, and leaders of the Jewish communities of Argentina, Brazil, Bolivia, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Ecuador, Panama, Paraguay, Peru, Uruguay and Venezuela.

In his address to the Pope, Jack Terpins highlighted the close and fruitful cooperation between Catholics and Jews in almost all Latin American countries, saying: “Resorting to dialogue as a tool has helped develop models to get to know ourselves better and for the communities of faith to gain greater understanding. Agreement among religions is not the only prerequisite but certainly means a major step forward. Together, we can send out a strong message to society at large: i.e. working to help the neediest and defending family, pluralism and democracy, always under the umbrella of the common values revered by our religious traditions.” The LAJC president also expressed his appreciation at the fact that the Vatican had full diplomatic relations with Israel, “that 64-year-old, young state, in a changing world in which the old anti-Semitism is often disguised as anti-Zionism.”

After the half-hour long meeting with Benedict XVI WJC President Ronald S. Lauder said: “Today, relations between Jews and Catholics are better than at any time over the past 2,000 years, despite the occasional disagreement here or there. This is especially true in Latin America which is overwhelmingly Catholic. The enormous efforts Pope Benedict and his predecessor have invested are now paying off, and they have reduced tensions noticeably. We appreciate the hand of friendship which the Pope has again extended to the Jewish people.”

About the WJC and LAJC

The WJC is the international organization representing Jewish communities in 100 countries to governments, parliaments and international organizations. The LAJC is the regional affiliate of the WJC in Latin America and federates the Jewish communities in Central and South America.