



ARIS

ALLIANCE OF
RABBIS IN ISLAMIC STATES

PROMOTING PEACE, COEXISTENCE, AND TOLERANCE
BY SUPPORTING JEWISH LIFE IN MUSLIM COUNTRIES



First Annual Report 2021

www.rabbisalliance.org

Welcome from our Chair



BH, Rosh Hodesh Kislev 5782

Friends,

Before the signing of the historic Abraham Accords, an alliance of rabbis was quietly supporting Jewish life in some Muslim countries. The signing of the Accords opened a new era in Muslim-Jewish relations and with it the public formation of the Alliance of Rabbis in Islamic States (ARIS) – a 501c3 nonprofit whose work took on an unprecedented level of excitement and urgency.

ARIS exists to support existing Jewish communities and their Rabbinic leadership, and now with the signing of the Accords our work can be more public, more prominent, more comprehensive, and more encompassing. We can now expand to new countries, develop interfaith programs, and be influential in normalizing Jewish life in the Muslim world.

- ARIS is actively leading and supporting Rabbis across the Muslim world and working to ensure that Jews can freely practice their faith.
- ARIS is committed to expanding and strengthening its work as a critical step toward warmer relations between Jews, Muslims, and other religions throughout the world.
- Our rabbis have created a bottom-up program to build bridges of understanding and cooperation our world so desperately needs.

We read in the Torah about the History of the Jewish People. About Abraham who was born in Ur – present day Iraq, traveling to Haran – in present day Turkey, and then following G-D's orders to go to the Land of Israel and then onward to Egypt. The story of Abraham, father of many nations, is the story of this region and our story.

As we mark our first annual report and approach the festival of Hanukkah, the holiday of light, thank you for helping us shine a light on the important and meaningful work of rabbis and Jewish communities throughout the Muslim world.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Mendy Chitrik', written in a cursive style.

Rabbi Mendy Chitrik
Chair

ARIS Advisory Board



Alexander Machkevich
Kazakhstan
FOUNDING PATRON



Carole Basri
USA



Daniel Berkove
Israel



Rabbi Avraham Berkowitz
USA



Nir Boms
Israel



Sandra Dangoor
UK



Brigitte Dayan
USA



Jason Epstein
USA



Rabbi Levi Matusof
Paris



Eli Ovits
Israel



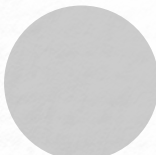
Joy Malka Rothenberg
Israel



Daniel Seal
UAE



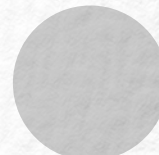
Tuli Skaist
USA



Leizer Schiner
USA



Dr. Efrat Sopher
UK



Solomon M. Sarway
USA

Presidium Council



Rabbi Shimon Gad Elituv
Member of the Council of
Israeli Chief Rabbinate



Rabbi David Rafael Banon
Montreal Bet Din

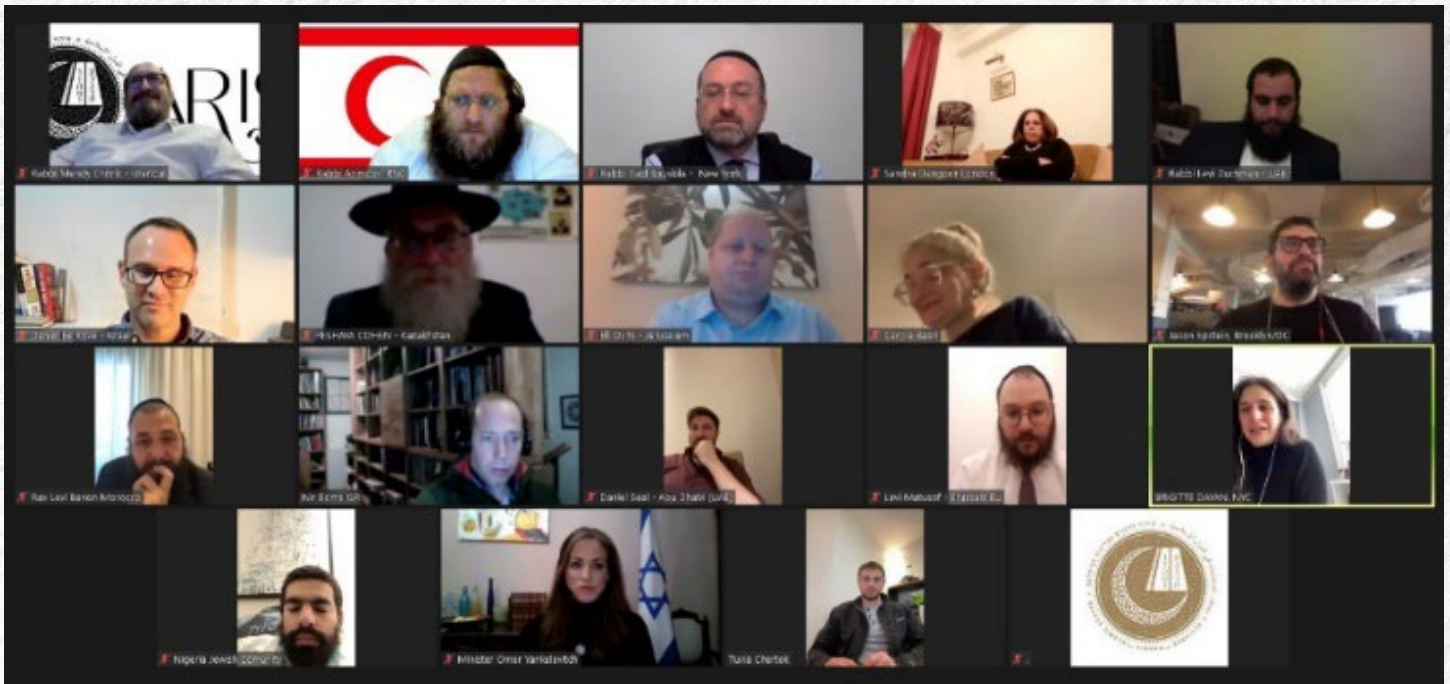


Rabbi Haim Bitan
Chief Rabbi of Tunisia



Rabbi Gad Bouskila
Rabbi of Netivot Yisrael Moroccan
community of NY

ARIS Advisory Council meetings have taken place on a regular basis with members joining from the UAE, UK, USA, Israel, and elsewhere.



Executive Board Meeting in New York



ARIS Mission

Mission:

To support, sustain, and advocate on behalf of Jewish life across Islamic States.

Our Aspirations:

- Provide a platform for rabbis and Jewish communities in Muslim countries to connect with and support one another on issues of common concern, as well as to serve as a collective voice that complements their individual engagement and advocacy with national governments and beyond.
- Enable and safeguard Jewish practice across the Muslim world – from arranging, leading, and teaching prayers and festival traditions to ensuring the provision – and even encouraging the production – of kosher food locally. Also, to strengthen the capacity of local Jewish communities to serve as a “home away from home” for Jewish visitors and business travelers.
- Advance the strategic engagement between faith leaders through the formation of the ARIS Charter – and transforming the Abraham Accords into an active grassroots dialogue between peoples.
- Develop a global network of Friends of ARIS who assist ARIS by providing strategic advice, expanded networks of professional and personal contacts, professional services, and political and financial support.
- Develop online content that promotes ARIS, focusing such critical issues, among others, as interfaith dialogue, Jewish faith-based connections to Hebrew and the Land of Israel, and community profiles in locally spoken languages such as English, Arabic, Farsi, and Hebrew. ARIS will also generate and disseminate related content on social media channels as an authoritative voice on Jewish affairs in Muslim communities worldwide.
- Visits between ARIS leaders across members-states will help solidify and solidify the network and forge stronger connections between the communities residing in Muslim societies. These ties will enable local branches to benefit from a global network spanning Asia, Africa and Europe.
- Convene Rabbis and communal leaders for an annual in-person summit – with training workshops, dialogue with faith leaders etc. to be hosted by a member/Muslim state.

ARIS Communities in Numbers

	Jewish population	Jewish tourists (estimated)*	Muslim population	Total population (incl. for reference)	Total rabbinical leadership	
Current ARIS communities	Leadership					
	Albania	50	2,000	1,797,645	2,877,797	1
	Azerbaijan	30,000	70,000	9,735,074	10,139,177	10
	Bashkortostan	3,000		2,230,747	4,063,293	1
	Iran	12,000		82,500,000	83,992,949	12
	Kazakhstan	20,000	2,500	13,158,672	18,776,707	8
	Kosovo	50	2,000	1,663,412	1,739,825	1
	Kyrgyzstan	3,000		4,679,436	6,524,195	1
	Morocco	2,500	200,000-350,000	37,930,989	36,910,560	12
	Nigeria	850	2,000	99,000,000	206,139,589	2
	North Cyprus	250	75,000	322,740	326,000	1
	Tatarstan	3,500		2,094,972	3,894,000	1
	Tunisia	1,000	5,000	11,190,000	11,818,619	1
	Turkey	13,000	200,000+	79,850,000	84,339,067	9
	Uganda	800	2,000	5,435,234	45,741,007	1
	United Arab Emirates	1,500	200,000-350,000	4,615,081	9,890,402	4
	Uzbekistan	5,000	7,000	26,550,000	33,469,203	1
ARIS Expansion Plans	ARIS Expansion Plans					
	Algeria	50	minimal	41,240,913	43,851,044	-
	Bahrain	50	50,000	1,063,239	1,701,575	-
	Egypt	100	30,000	80,024,000	97,100,000	
	Indonesia	100	15,000	229,000,000	229,000,000	-
	Kuwait	50-100	minimal	2,175,684	4,270,571	-
	Malaysia	100	2,500	19,500,000	31,950,000	
	Oman	Expat no. unknown	minimal	2,427,000	5,106,626	-
	Qatar	Expat no. unknown		2,881,000	1,950,437	
	Saudi Arabia	100	minimal	31,878,000	34,813,871	-

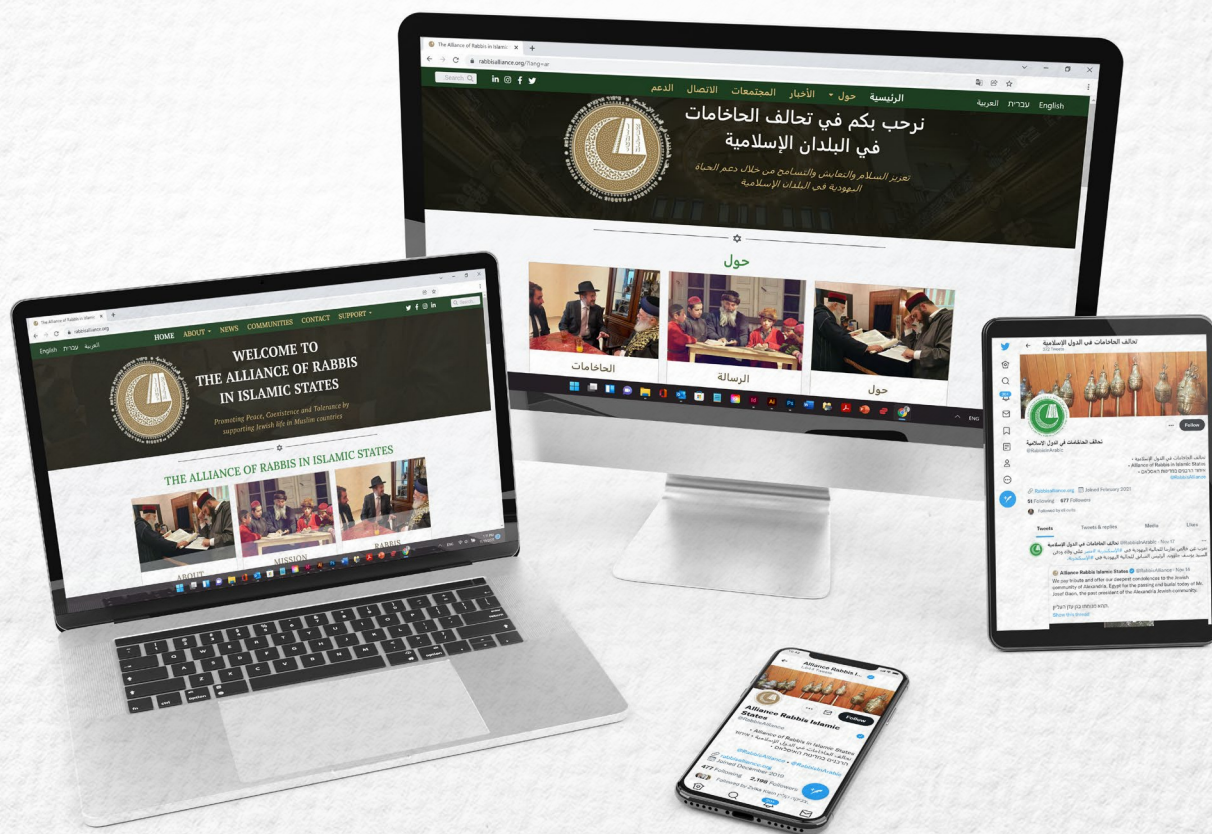
* The number of Jewish tourists is expected to increase significantly with the signing of the Abraham Accords and the re-opening of international travel post-Covid.

Media – in English, Arabic, and Hebrew

ARIS is active on Twitter, Facebook, and LinkedIn where we showcase to the Muslim world and to others, active Jewish life in Muslim countries with the aim of fostering the normalization of Jewish life and Jews living peacefully as Jews in Muslim countries.

One such example was over Pesach, when ARIS used social media to share stories of Jewish traditions and rituals being practiced by the Jewish communities in Muslim countries. The posts, in Arabic, English, and Hebrew, facilitate Muslims' understanding of Pesach rituals AND work to normalize that Jews are proudly observing a Jewish holiday, in public, in Muslim countries.

ARIS has influential followers from around the world, and our posts are increasingly re-tweeted in Arabic by journalists, influencers, and organizations.



5781 Highlights

- **March/April 2021** – ARIS leadership traveled to Washington, D.C. to meet with ambassadors of Kazakhstan, Azerbaijan, and Turkey to discuss strengthening the Jewish communities in their respective countries.

At the initiation of ARIS leadership, the Turkish ambassador hosted a kosher interfaith iftar meal at the Embassy of Turkey in Washington, D.C., which included leaders from Jewish, Christian, and Muslim communities, as well as several other dignitaries.



- Throughout year, ARIS leadership met with **prominent leaders and ministers** in Israel to discuss ARIS' work in Muslim countries. Meetings included: the head of the Jewish Agency of Israel and current President of Israel, Isaac Herzog, Minister of the Diaspora Nachman Shay, MK Omer Yankelovich, as well as others.

- **ARIS leaders are involved in interfaith events with Muslims and Christians in Muslim countries.**

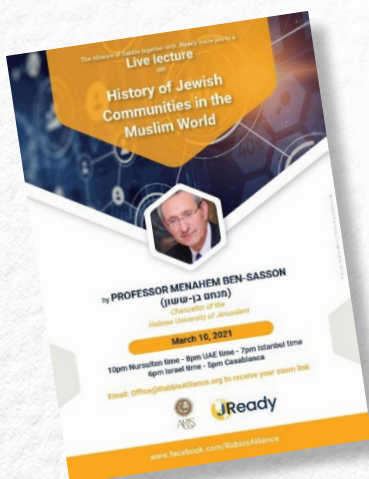
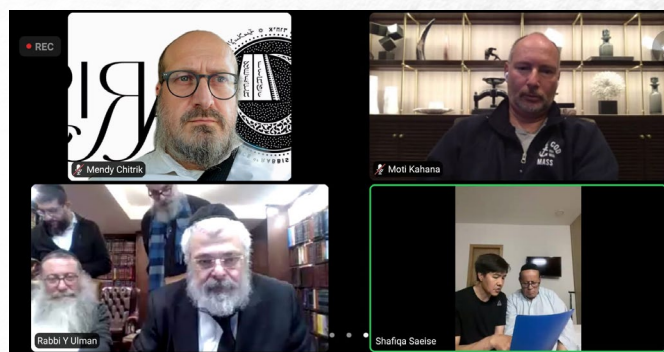


Metropolitan Gregorios ÜREK of Adıyaman



Sufi teacher in the Mevlana

- **September 2021** – Helped the release of Zevulun Simantov, the last Jew of Afghanistan.



One of this year's highlights was the packing and distribution of Ramadan food packages in Nigeria.



- ARIS leaders arranged kosher slaughtering in the UAE to supply kosher chicken and meet to resident and visitors to the region.

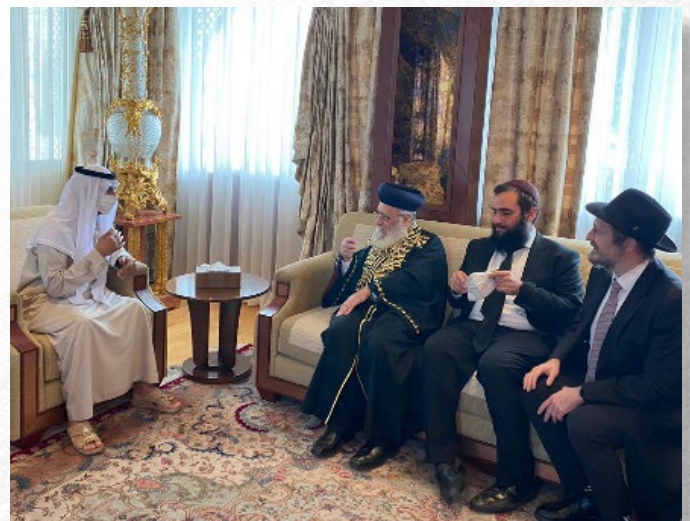


- Meeting in Abu Dhabi of Chief Rabbi of Kazakhstan - Rabbi Yeshaya Kohen, Rabbi of the UAE – Rabbi Levi Duchman, Leader of Abu Dhabi Jewish community - Daniel Seal, Rabbi Mendy Chitrit, and Ambassador David Friedman.

- In late 2020, ARIS leaders traveled with R Yitzchak Yosef, Rishon Lezion Chief Rabbi of Israel, to Abu Dhabi and Dubai to meet with government officials. This was the first such visit of a sitting chief rabbi to the UAE. The trip included putting up a mezuzah in the Dubai Jewish school, laying a cornerstone for a new mikvah in Dubai, praying at the newly established synagogues in Abu Dhabi and Dubai, lighting Chanukah candles in the Dubai Synagogue, meeting with the Yemenite Jewish community living in Abu Dhabi, and receiving permits for the Jewish community in Dubai.



Together with Rabbi Duchman, Rabbi of the UAE, the group met with ministers and high-ranking officials to support the establishment of Jewish communities in the UAE.



Presidium Council of ARIS

The Presidium Council is comprised of the five leading Sefardic rabbis from Muslim countries who serve as mentors to ARIS rabbis.

Rishon LeZion, the Sefardic Chief Rabbi of Israel, Rabbi Yitzchak Yosef, provided a letter stating that he will continue to provide halachic guidance to ARIS and providing his endorsement of the Presidium Council.

BS"D, 3 Adar, 5781, 807-5-15/81

HaRav HaGa'on Menachem Mendel Chitrik, Shlit"a
Chairman of the Alliance of Rabbis in Islamic States

I was delighted to hear of the establishment of the Alliance of Rabbis in Islamic States, presided over by the great Rabbis, HaGa'on Rabbi Shimon Gad Elituv, member of the Chief Rabbinate of Israel's Council; HaGa'on Rabbi Haim Bitan, Chief Rabbi of Tunisia; HaGa'on Rabbi David Rephael Benon, Badatz Montreal; HaGa'on Rabbi Avraham Hamra, Chief Rabbi of Syrian Expatriates, HaGa'on Rabbi Gad Buskila, Chief Rabbi of Netivot Yisrael Community.

With immense gratitude to Hashem Yitbarach, we have merited to see the hearts of leaders of Arab and Islamic countries connect to the peace agreements with Israel and, as a result, many Jews are returning to live in these places and visiting there. Now, during our visit to the United Arab Emirates, we discovered that the community there has needs and we must work with the government officials in all areas of religion requiring official approval, and Be'ezrat Hashem they will respond to our requests to meet with them and they will permit holding Jewish prayers, as well as constructing mikva'ot, Talmud Torahs [Jewish Schools] etc.

We must give thanks for the initiative to set up the Alliance of Rabbis in Islamic States, which strives to unite all Jewish communities in these places, while recognizing the official authorities in each and every state, thus providing assistance to all needs of members of the various Jewish communities.

In addition, I would like to give thanks for the Alliance's decision to take action in each of these countries, to instruct halacha according to the customs of Maran Beit Yosef, zichro yagen aleinu, the spiritual leader and guide of the Sephardim and Bnei Edot Hamizrach, and have accepted his rulings in all matters, whether he took the lenient or the strict approach, and according to that stated in the books of Maran, our teacher and spiritual guide, ztz"l, and that discussed in the books "Yalkut Yosef."

We wish to extend our sincere blessings, that they should continue in their important work to bring the Jewish People closer to our Torah and the path of Halacha and Mitzvot, according to the heritage that has been passed on to us from generation to generation, and may they succeed in blessing the Name of Hashem and succeed in all they do, Amen.

Bivirkat HaTorah,

Rabbi Yitzchak Yosef
The Rishon LeZion
Chief Rabbi of Israel



ARIS Rabbis in Action

Here are some highlights from this past year of ARIS Rabbis' independent programs which took place across the Muslim world:

- ARIS rabbis were involved in various events taking place in Muslim countries, including placing *mezuzot* in the new Embassy of Israel in Abu Dhabi (pictured here), programs at Expo 2020 in Dubai, and many others.
- ARIS Rabbi Uzan, Chief Rabbi of Nigeria meets with the Imam of Abuja, Nigeria about Ramadan food distribution to the needy.



Synagogues



Press Clippings

News articles about ARIS, op-eds by ARIS rabbis

- The Jerusalem Post: Last Jew leaves Afghanistan
<https://www.jpost.com/breaking-news/the-last-jew-in-afghanistan-is-en-route-to-the-united-states-678882>
- Forward: As Taliban take charge, uncertain future for Afghanistan's Jewish heritage sites
<https://forward.com/news/474297/taliban-jewish-heritage-afghanistan-herat/>
- JTA: This rabbi is tweeting his unusual 3-week Jewish heritage road trip through Turkey
<https://www.jta.org/2021/08/09/global/this-rabbi-is-tweeting-his-unusual-3-week-jewish-heritage-road-trip-through-turkey>
- Times of Israel: Personal relationships are the future of Jewish-Muslim coexistence
<https://blogs.timesofisrael.com/personal-relationships-are-the-future-of-jewish-muslim-coexistence/>
- The Jerusalem Post: For Jews in the Muslim world, an increasingly bright future awaits
<https://m.jpost.com/opinion/for-jews-in-the-muslim-world-an-increasingly-bright-future-awaits-661731>
- The Jerusalem Post: Passover in Muslim countries: Matzah in Iran, seder in UAE
<https://m.jpost.com/diaspora/passover-in-muslim-countries-matza-in-iran-seder-in-uae-662187>
- Ami Magazine: Small Islands of Jews in a Muslim Sea: The rabbis of Jewish communities in Islamic countries join together to strengthen each other
<https://www.amimagazine.org/2020/05/20/small-islands-of-jews-in-a-muslim-sea/>
- eJewish Philanthropy: Rabbis as Peacemakers
<https://ejewishphilanthropy.com/rabbis-as-peacemakers/>
- Jewish News Syndicate: For a future of peace, Jews and Muslims should build bridges
<https://www.jns.org/opinion/for-a-future-of-peace-jews-and-muslims-should-build-bridges/>
- The Jerusalem Post: Afghanistan's last Jew departs for Israel after granting wife divorce
<https://www.jpost.com/diaspora/afghanistans-last-jew-departs-for-israel-after-granting-wife-divorce-682284>
- Turkish Government highlights work of ARIS
<https://twitter.com/trtworld/status/1453373419714584577>
- Daily Sabah: Rabbi behind Afghan rescue explores Turkey's Jewish heritage
<https://www.dailysabah.com/turkey/minorities/rabbi-behind-afghan-rescue-explores-turkeys-jewish-heritage>



Letters of Support and Appreciation



With Thanks

ARIS' accomplishments would not have been possible without the time dedicated by fellow ARIS Rabbis, our advisory council, and organisational consultants Altruists.



Thank you to our founding patron Mr. Alexander Mashkevich for his wisdom, generosity, and leadership – helping connect Rabbis and Jewish communities across the Muslim world.

Also, thank you to the Jewish Agency for Israel, Meromim, the Global Jewish Assistance and Relief Network, and Keren Hayesod for the generous seed project and core funding.

Goals and plans for the coming year

Our plans for the coming year focus on our leaders, our communities, and our outreach to Muslim countries.

For our leaders:

- An in-person conference for our Rabbis and advisory board will be part of our efforts to strengthen and expand our professional development programs.

For our communities:

- Our leadership will visit Jewish communities through the Islamic countries to assess needs and populations so we can better support these communities.
- We aim to establish ARIS led communities in 5-9 new Muslim countries.
- We will expand our holiday assistance programs, which includes, food and ritual objects.

Outreach efforts:

- We will expand our website to include additional languages popular in Islamic countries. Our plans are to add Turkish, French, and Russian this year.

Looking to the future

Thank you to our many supports for your assistance in our inaugural year.

The challenge of strengthening Jewish communities and their leaders across the Muslim world, and the normalization of the existence of Jewish life in the Muslim world is an immense one; yet the return on investment is of strategic importance for the Jewish people.

Please join us in furthering our mission to create a world of mutual respect and understanding between people of all faiths.

ARIS seeks additional benefactors and patrons to help in its critical mission.
Please be in touch to also discuss various programmatic naming opportunities.

Contact ARIS today at
office@rabbisalliance.com

Donations can be made online at
www.rabbisalliance.org/support



ARIS