

# Clemens N. Nathan

24th August 1933-2<sup>nd</sup> June 2015

*“Dedicated his life to human rights fighting for Jews and non-Jews alike  
persecuted in all parts of the world”.*

**Alliance Israelite Universelle**

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Clemens N. Nathan died on 2nd June 2015 in London at the age of 81. A German-Jewish refugee who came to England as a young boy in the 1930s, Clemens worked tirelessly as a passionate champion of Jewish causes, international human rights and interfaith relations.

As past President (1983-1989) and honorary vice-President of the Anglo-Jewish Association (AJA) and as joint chairman of the Consultative Council of Jewish Organisations (CCJO) Clemens had a longstanding and close relationship with the Alliance Israélite universelle with which he shared a similar outlook, spanning nearly 40 years.

Born in Hamburg in August 1933, Clemens and his family came to England in 1936 to escape the worsening situation in Germany. Though he had a happy childhood in Buckinghamshire with his parents, grandparents and sister, away from the London blitz, he was profoundly affected by his father’s internment in 1940 as an “enemy alien” (many male German-Jewish refugees were treated as such by the British Government at this time). His own personal experience drove him to become involved with organisations that worked to alleviate persecution in Europe, protect the rights of Jews and promote a more tolerant society.

It was a chance encounter in the 1960s with René Cassin, former president of the Alliance Israélite universelle, and founder of the CCJO that set Clemens firmly on his path of pursuing the cause of human rights from the standpoint of Jewish experience and values. On behalf of the AJA, Clemens had presented a paper to the CCJO in Paris on the plight of the Jews in the Soviet Union. As a result of listening to Clemens’ speech Cassin invited him to accompany him to the Human Rights Commission at the UN.

Clemens went on to become Joint Chair of the CCJO representing Jewish interests at the United Nations in Geneva and New York as well as at the Council of Europe and UNESCO. He also joined the effort to seek a small measure of justice for Holocaust victims, serving as a Board Member of the Conference on Jewish Material Claims Against Germany (the “Claims Conference”) for over a decade as well as Chairman of its Nominating Committee. Here he was involved in negotiations with Germany regarding direct payments to Nazi victims and, increasingly, its funding to aid elderly victims with homecare. There were also talks with Austria about its obligations, including to the Kindertransport children.

He was a founding force in CCJO René Cassin, a human rights charity set up to energise the younger generation to become active in the human rights sphere and to represent Jewish interests at the UN. He also became founding chairman (1998-2003) of The Centre for the Study of Jewish-Christian Relations (now the Woolf Institute) in Cambridge whose goal is to promote dialogue between the three Abrahamic faiths through teaching and research activities.

In 2007, Clemens chose to focus his energies on furthering human rights through research by founding the Clemens Nathan Research Centre. In its short lifetime, the Centre has been prolific, organising or sponsoring ten international conferences and producing or contributing to over 20 reports and books with high calibre speakers and writers from multiple disciplines. Clemens set a broad direction for the Centre that looked beyond Jewish issues, to examine universal themes and issues such as 21<sup>st</sup> century slavery, freedom of expression and the relationship between religion and human rights. Examples of The Centre output are *How to Complain to the UN Human Rights Treaty System (2002)* and a conference on Foreign Policy & Human Rights.

*“He was the human of human rights...energy for international engagement, his genuine concern for the welfare of others, his strong conviction and integrity, and his thirst for knowledge and challenge in all endeavours.”*

**René Cassin NGO**

He is predeceased by two years by his wife Rachel of nearly 50 years and is survived by his three children and five grandchildren.