

Michael Melchior, born 31 January 1954 is the Chief Rabbi of Norway, and a former member of Knesset for Meimad. A descendant of seven generations of rabbis in Denmark, Melchior was born in Copenhagen, Denmark in 1954. He was ordained as an Orthodox Rabbi at Yeshivat Hakotel of Jerusalem in 1980. Soon afterwards he returned to Scandinavia to serve as Chief Rabbi of Norway.

In 1986, he immigrated to Israel and settled down with his family in Jerusalem, while still holding the honorary title of Chief Rabbi of Norway. In late December 2011, it was reported that Melchior was being considered to succeed Jonathan Sacks as the Chief Rabbi of the United Kingdom and Ireland.

Melchior entered politics with the Meimad party in 1995. When Rabbi Yehuda Amital was appointed Minister without Portfolio after the assassination of Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin in November, 1995, Melchior served as Amital's assistant. Melchior was selected chairman of the managing committee of the Meimad party in early 1996. In the 1999 elections, Meimad ran as part of the One Israel alliance with the Labor Party and Gesher. Melchior won a seat, and was appointed Minister of Social & Diaspora Affairs on 5 August 1999, a post he held until Ariel Sharon became Prime Minister in 2001. Melchior was re-elected to the Knesset as a member of the joint list in 2003 and 2006 as Meimad continued their alliance with the Labor Party. In 2008 Meimad broke away from the alliance and ran in partnership with the Green Movement in the 2009 elections, but failed to win a seat. Melchior has been involved in a number of left-wing and non-partisan Jewish and Israeli organizations concerned with interfaith dialogue, education, inter-Jewish relations, the environment, economics and Arab-Israeli peace. Among them is Meitarim, a network of pluralistic Jewish schools in Israel that educate religious and secular students together.

As part of his official roles in the Knesset and the Israeli government, Melchior was involved with Birthright Israel, an organization that has brought over 200,000 young Jews to explore their heritage in Israel and the Yachad Council, which promotes dialogue between secular and religious Jews, and he founded and continues to serve as honorary chairman of the Citizens' Accord Forum Between Jews and Arabs in Israel.

In 2002, Melchior initiated - together with his Palestinian counterpart Sheikh Talal Sider - an inter-religious summit in Alexandria, Egypt, co-sponsored by the Mufti of Egypt, Grand Imam of al-Azhar Mosque and Grand Sheikh of al-Azhar University - Muhammad Sayyid Tantawi, Archbishop of Canterbury - George Carey, and Rabbi Eliyahu Bakshi-Doron - Israel's Chief Rabbi. The summit, which launched The Alexandria Process, brought together religious leaders from the Middle-East to adopt common principles aimed at preventing the region's religious sensibilities being exploited during conflicts, and declaring the need to work together towards peaceful solutions of the conflicts.[citation needed] Together with Elie Weisel, Melchior created the Mosaica Center for Interreligious Cooperation to "lead to the implementation" of the principles of the Alexandria Declaration.

More controversially, in September 2012, Melchior claimed that that extremist Islamic leaders including the leaders of Hamas are ready for peaceful co-existence with Israel, and he added that he has "yet to meet with somebody who is not willing to make peace" with the Jewish state of Israel, placing the onus for lack of peace with extremist Islamic movements on Israel. Recently, Melchior has involved himself in economic issues. Melchior co-founded the Israel Civic Action Forum which promotes higher taxation on income from the extraction of natural resources, and the use of the tax income for higher government spending to increase government spending on welfare, education and health.

Melchior is a recipient of The Norwegian Award For Tolerance & Bridge Building in the Noble Institute (1988),[citation needed] The Church Of England's Coventry International Prize For Peace & Reconciliation (2002),[citation needed] and the Liebhaber Prize For The Promotion Of Religious Tolerance And Cultural Pluralism (2007).

