



Conference of European Churches
Conférence des Églises européennes
Konferenz Europäischer Kirchen
Конференция Европейских Церквей

Towards peaceful coexistence in the Middle East

On 14./15. December 2018, some 50 representatives of Churches, aid organisations, politics and academia have gathered at Cumberland Lodge, Windsor Great Park, to explore avenues towards peaceful coexistence in the Middle East. The Conference brought together Christians from that region and from Europe to arrive at a common understanding and solidarity.

Having heard reports from Egypt, Iraq, Israel, Jordan, Lebanon, Palestine, and Syria, reflecting on subjects such as pluralism, citizenship, education and Human Rights, and having discussed them intensively, the participants endorsed this communiqué:

Conference Communiqué

The Conference,
aware of

- *the history of Christianity in the Middle East, faithful to the Gospel, going back to its earliest days;*
- *the contribution of all religions to the cultural richness of the region, in particular that of the three Abrahamic religions;*
- *periods of peaceful coexistence in history of people of different faiths and of the different peoples domiciled in the region;*
- *the dramatic exodus of Christians of all church traditions from their homelands in the Middle East due to conflict and war, religious discrimination and persecution as well as economic destitution;*
- *the need of the remaining Christians for safety and peace, as well as their calling onto their brothers and sisters in other parts of the world to see, hear and act;*
- *Europe's historic and present relationship with the Middle East, which has contributed to the current situation and calls for ongoing readiness to respond;*

draws the following conclusions:

- *From the early 20th century with its great distortions, many people in the Middle East never had the time and opportunity for achieving peace and reconciliation, both of which need determination, attention and resources;*
- *Peaceful coexistence in the 21st century must be based on a separation of powers, citizenship, equality before the law, non-discrimination, social justice, full participation, and mutual respect;*
- *Religious communities and their leaders have a responsibility for putting human dignity at the centre, advocating for neighbourly love, non-violent conflict resolution and an active process of reconciliation. Forgiveness and the postulate 'love thy enemy' can be a specific Christian contribution to peace processes and the reconstruction of societies;*

BRUSSELS

Rue Joseph II, 174
BE-1000 Brussels, Belgium
tel.: +32 2 230 17 32
fax: +32 2 231 14 13
e-mail: cec@cec-kek.be

STRASBOURG

8, rue du Fossé des Treize
FR-67000 Strasbourg, France
tel.: +33 3 88 15 27 60
fax: +33 3 88 15 27 61
e-mail: cec-strasbourg@cec-kek.be

www.ceceurope.org



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– Religious communities can draw upon valuable experiences in education, specifically peace education. Mixed denominational schools play an important part in bringing up young people in a spirit of friendship, involving mothers and fathers in reaching a new understanding of education, and by doing so setting an example for the education system as a whole.

and makes the following recommendations:

- States must be the homestead of all its inhabitants, regardless of faith, conviction and ethnicity, establishing full and equal citizenship;*
- States must develop a deeper understanding of human dignity, guarantee and implement human rights, including Freedom of Religion or Belief. In a pluralistic society the religious diversity and cultural richness of its citizens must become visible in the private and in the public sphere.*

- Religious communities should distinguish between the religious significance of their holy lands or places and territorial power over them. Sharing cultural sites must not be seen as a matter of competition, but of commonality;*
- Religious communities should deepen their theological understanding of coexistence, allowing for an absolute belief in their religious truth as well as a respect for other ways to serve God and humankind;*
- Religious communities should work towards a holistic vision of justice for all, overcoming indifference, ignorance and fear.*
- Religious communities should create spaces for encounters, especially for the younger generations, so that they may grow up in a spirit of friendship, not of prejudice and hatred;*
- Religious communities should engage in interreligious dialogue, bearing witness to individual dignity and working for the common good, aware that a peace note will not come from the sword, but the softly spoken word;*

- States and societies in Europe and other parts of the world must not forget about the plight of the peoples in the region and in particular its Christian communities; ongoing conflict and seemingly insurmountable obstacles must not lead to disinterest and fatalism, but to increased efforts at mediation and support;*
- States and societies in Europe and other parts of the world must also become aware of the manifold economic dimensions of the conflicts in the Middle East and their entanglement in them;*
- States and societies in Europe and other parts of the world should become more actively engaged in promoting peace and reconciliation in the Middle East, not only on ethical grounds, but also as the conflicts have an impact on many other regions in the world;*
- Churches in Europe and other parts of the world must show true sisterhood with the Churches in the Middle East, expressing solidarity in prayer, advocacy, and practical support.*

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The conference also notes that the need for peaceful coexistence is also a challenge for Europe, which has become a new home – temporary or permanent – to many refugees from the Middle East, increasing the religious pluralism in Europe. In this context, European Churches can learn from the wisdom and experience of their sister Churches in the Middle East.

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