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;
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.

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.