

Conference of European Churches Governing Board

Leuven, 4 – 6 December 2014

Statement on the Persecution of Religious Minorities in the Middle East Region

The Conference of European Churches (CEC) expresses its concerns about very serious violations of fundamental human rights, the humanitarian crisis and the security situation in the Middle East region, especially in the conflicts in Syria and Iraq. CEC deeply regrets that the situation continues to worsen. CEC urges that targeted killings, forced religious conversions, trafficking of women and children, recruiting of children for suicide bombings, the beheading of Christians and members of other religious minorities based on their religion or belief, and vandalism of religious sites, cultural heritage and places of worship must end immediately.

On a daily basis, innocent lives of people belonging to religious and ethnic minorities including Christians from the ancient churches in the region, Yazidi, Turkmen, Shabak, Kaka'e, Sabian and Shia communities, moderate Muslims, Kurds are taken by the self-proclaimed Islamic State (IS) and other extremist groups. Many Muslim religious leaders disagree with their practice of ethnic and religious "cleansing". It is our conviction that religious pluralism is a basic principle of human rights. This most grievous situation needs a strong international and European response.

CEC supports the efforts of the Middle East Council of Churches, and stands hand-in-hand with its Christian brothers and sisters, and all people of goodwill who are looking for peace solutions in the inflamed region. In particular we pray for the abducted Archbishops of Aleppo, Archbishop Gregorios Yohanna Ibrahim and Archbishop Paul Yazigi.

We ask international peace negotiators to bring the voice of religious and ethnic minorities into peace processes and to engage faiths and convictions in peaceful dialogue. While recognising that the EU Foreign Affairs Council and European Council have issued their conclusions on the situation in Iraq and Syria, we, the Conference of European Churches, urge the European Institutions to:

1. Pay special attention to the religious dimension of the existing conflict - especially the instrumentalisation of Islam - and implement an ongoing comprehensive plan to combat current extremism and radical ideology, which have also infected some Europeans and other foreign fighters and led them to support IS.
2. Call on those in conflict to respect freedom of religion or belief as a fundamental human right guaranteed by Art. 18 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and use the potential of ecumenical and inter-religious bodies, together with other civil society organisations to promote peace and religious tolerance.

3. Encourage EU member states to increase, as a matter of urgency, their assistance, humanitarian aid and refugee protection to those who belong to Iraqi or Syrian minorities, or any other minorities living in these territories, without consideration of their religion or belief, age, sex, ethnicity and to place special emphasis on women and children, people with disabilities and elderly people and single persons who have lost their families.
4. Extend and create possibilities for family members to be admitted to EU Member States in order to join their families with priority and reduced bureaucratic hurdles.
5. Substantially and urgently increase immediate financial support to the World Food Program in those countries that host refugees, and also ensure medical supplies, personnel, and winter shelter.
6. Implement EU Guidelines on the promotion and protection of Freedom of Religion or Belief (2013) in order to promote human rights and human dignity of all people and nations without taking into account their country of origin.
7. Demand the implementation by EU member states of the EP resolution of 18 September 2014 on the situation in Iraq and Syria, and the IS offensive, including the persecution of minorities (2014/2843/ (RSP)) as well as the UN Security Council Resolution 2170(2014) and UN Human Rights Council resolution S_22/L.1(2014).

CEC supports efforts of the UNHCR and of neighbouring countries to the conflict aimed at providing protection and safety to refugees and also request European states to considerably increase their refugee resettlement contingents.

We call upon all churches in Europe to join us in our prayers for all people who are suffering in conditions of extreme privation, and in expressing solidarity with churches and individual Christians in Syria, Iraq and the whole Middle East region. We pray that an end to these conflicts can be found so that peace may prevail in their homeland, where Christians have been present for centuries. We invite CEC member churches and all people of goodwill to carry out advocacy in this difficult moment vis-à-vis their own governments and to stand in solidarity in welcoming refugees and asylum seekers. We encourage other religious representatives to join us in this appeal to strengthen multicultural and multi-religious society in the Middle East region.

See also previous statements of the CEC governing board:

Press Release No. 13/12 - 23.04.13

[CEC calls for prayers for kidnapped Archbishops of Aleppo](#)

We must speak out for religious tolerance, justice and peace

Press Release No. 13/14 - 24.05.13

[CEC calls for continued prayers for release of Syrian archbishops](#)

Press Release No. 13/15 - 04.06.13

[Conference issues statement on Christian presence in the Middle East](#)

Press Release CEC Assembly #23 - 18.07.13

[Letter from the Assembly to Churches in Syria](#)

Press Release No: 13/21 - 28.08.13

[CEC urges efforts at global consensus after Syrian 'chemical attack'](#)

Press Release No. 13/22 - 09.09.13

[Statement from the Presidents of the Conference of European Churches \(CEC\) and the Council of European Episcopal Conferences \(CEE\)](#)

Press Release No: 13/31 - 02.12.13

[CEC calls for Syrian refugees' access to safety in Europe](#)