

Athens, 28 September 2015

High level Christian and Muslim religious leaders from the Middle East met in Athens on 3 September 2015 and endorsed the “Athens Declaration: United Against Violence in the Name of Religion - Supporting the Citizenship Rights of Christians, Muslims and Other Religious and Ethnic Groups in the Middle East”.

The religious leaders called upon political leaders and civil society to take a strong stand against growing violent extremism and terrorism which threaten centuries of peaceful coexistence in the Middle East. The religious leaders will support early efforts to stem attempts to segregate religious communities and foster conflict.

“Hundreds of thousands of Christians, Muslims and other religious and ethnic groups have already been subjected to horrible violence and persecution. If action is not taken, the vibrancy and diversity of communities in the region will be lost forever. KAICIID will now be working to develop with the religious leaders joint local projects to help these communities,” stated Metropolitan Emmanuel, a co-convenor of the meeting and a KAICIID Board of Directors member.

Athens Declaration

The religious leaders were gathered in Athens to attend a meeting on supporting peaceful coexistence and citizenship rights of Christians, Muslims, and other religious and ethnic groups in the Middle East – a joint initiative of the Ecumenical Patriarchate and KAICIID, organised with the support of the Hellenic Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

At the conclusion of the conference, the leaders jointly issued the Athens Declaration, denouncing in the strongest terms the persecution of the Christian, other religious and ethnic communities in the Middle East.

Metropolitan Emmanuel said “religious leaders from many different faiths are speaking with one voice to express support for, and solidarity with, religious communities in Iraq and Syria that are persecuted,” he said.

In the Athens declaration the Christian and Muslim religious leaders jointly appealed to policymakers in the region to preserve diversity within their societies. They also called upon policy makers and media not to associate any terrorist act committed in the name of religion with any religion, and to host credible voices to speak in the name of religion.

United Against Violence in the Name of Religion

The meeting is part of the "Dialogue between Christians and Muslims" that the Ecumenical Patriarchate initiated, in partnership with relevant Islamic organizations, as a means to use interreligious dialogue to facilitate peace and reconciliation.

The meeting is also convened under KAICIID's "United against Violence in the Name of Religion (UVNR)" initiative, which seeks to foster cooperation between religious institutions and governments to counter extremism, particularly in Syria and Iraq.

The UVNR initiative was launched at a meeting in Vienna in November, 2014, where leaders of Muslim, Christian, and other religious and ethnic communities from Iraq, Syria and the larger Middle East region jointly issued the Vienna Declaration, which denounced violence in the name of religion.

Since then, the initiative has continued to grow. KAICIID, in partnership with UNESCO, the UN Office for the Prevention of Genocide and ISESCO, as well as NGOs, is implementing these recommendations.

Metropolitan Emmanuel added that the event underlines the Ecumenical Patriarchate's and KAICIID's mission to provide platforms where religious leaders can take an important and active role in peace building and conflict resolution.

The participating religious leaders included:

His Holiness Patriarch Aram I Keshishian, Head of the Catholicosate of the Great House of Cilicia and Catholicos of the Holy See of Cilicia of the Armenian Apostolic Church; His Beatitude Patriarch Gregory III Laham, the Melkite Greek Catholic Patriarch of Antioch and All the East, and Alexandria and Jerusalem; His Eminence Bishop Dionysious Jean Kawak, Patriarchal Vicar, Representative of His Holiness Syrian Orthodox Patriarch Mor Ignatius Aphrem II; His Eminence Metropolitan Bassilios Mansour, Metropolitan of Akkar and dependencies, Representative of His Beatitude Patriarch Yohanna X; His Grace John (Culibrk), Bishop of Slavonia, Serbian Orthodox Church; The Very Reverend Archimandrite Damianos, the Exarch of the Patriarchate of Jerusalem to Athens; Father Moussa Yacoub, Representative of His Holiness Pope Tawadoros II, Pope of the Alexandria and Patriarch of the See of St. Mark, head of the Coptic Orthodox Church of Egypt; His Excellency Mufti Abdul Kareem Khasawneh, Grand Mufti of Jordan; His Excellency Grand Mufti Abdel-Latif Derian, Grand Mufti of Lebanon; His Excellency Sayyid Ali Al-Amin, Shiá Religious Leader; Dr. Ibrahim Negm, Senior Advisor to the Grand Mufti Egypt, Representative of the Grand Mufti of Egypt, Shawki Ibrahim Alam; and Sheik Judge Gandhi Mekarem, Rep. of Sheik al-Aql Naim Hassan, Druze spiritual leader.

The participating international, interreligious and academic organisations included:

World Council of Churches, Middle East Council of Churches, Iraqi Council for Interfaith Dialogue, Arab Group for Muslim-Christian Dialogue, Order of Malta, Pro Oriente, Islamic Relief Worldwide, Azhar Dialogue Center, Organisation for Islamic Cooperation, Al-Imam Muhammad ibn Saud Islamic University, Saudi Arabia; Maronite League, Christian-Muslim National Committee for Dialogue, and the Lebanese Syriac League.

The participating KAICIID Board of Directors members included:



Dr. Hamad Al-Majed, Faculty Member, Imam Muhammad Bin Saud University; Reverend Father Miguel Ayuso; Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue; His Eminence Metropolitan Emmanuel; Exarch of the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople; Dr. Sayyed Ataollah Mohajerani, Religious Researcher and Writer; and Dr. Mohammad Sammak, Secretary-General of the National Committee for Christian-Muslim Dialogue.