



مجلس كنائس الشرق الأوسط
The Middle East Council of Churches

Final Statement of the 11th General Assembly of the Middle East Council of Churches

Amman, 8 September 2016

"Give thanks to the Lord for He is good, His mercy endures forever" (Psalm 136: 1)

1) The 11th General Assembly of the Middle East Council of Churches convened under this title for the first time in Amman – Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan, with the participation of the four church families that constitute the Council: The Oriental Orthodox Family, the Orthodox Family, the Catholic Family, and the Evangelical Family. The Council gathered from the 6th to the 8th of September 2016 with the generous hospitality of the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate of Jerusalem and the presence of the Presidents of the Council: Aram I, Catholicos of the Holy See of Cilicia of the Armenian Apostolic Church; Theophilos III, Patriarch of the Holy City of Jerusalem and All Palestine and Jordan; Mor Ignatius Youssef III Younan, Patriarch of Antioch and All the East of the Syriacs for the Syriac Catholic Church; and Bishop Munib Younan, Head of the Lutheran Church in Jordan and the Holy Land. The Heads of the member churches or their representatives, the members of the Executive Committee, and the Acting General-Secretary Father Michel Jalakh along with the staff of the Council were also present.

2) We thank the one God, the Father, the Creator, the Son, the Redeemer, and the Holy Spirit, the Comforter, who gathered us together in this General Assembly to pray and thank the Almighty for His gifts and grace that always overflow upon us. He is the righteous and the most gracious God who has created us in this part of the world where the Savior Jesus Christ was born, and from where the preaching of the Gospel was launched into the regions of the world, so that we become witnesses to His mercy and peace.

3) In the opening session, the Presidents of the Council, the Heads of member churches or their representatives, the Apostolic Nuncio in Iraq and Jordan, the representative of the Ecumenical Patriarch, and the Acting General-Secretary of the Council delivered their statements, affirming their support for the Council and its message, and stressing the importance of the Christians' persistence in the light of the difficult conditions they face.

4) The convention of the General Assembly comes at a time when the region is witnessing serious and decisive demographic transformations manifested by the escalation of the waves of conflict, violence, extremism, obscurantism, terrorism, ethnic and religious cleansing, displacement by annihilation and bloody means. These manifestations threaten the entity of the states, the safety of the communities, their diverse human fabric and the lives of their children. As usual, innocent civilians, Christians and non-Christians alike, pay the price for these conflicts with their lives, properties, security and stability, especially in recent years in Syria, Iraq and Lebanon, along with the continuing suffering of the Palestinian people for decades that have been deprived of their basic rights. Failure to realize international resolutions for the establishment of a Palestinian state with its full components is another ongoing source of suffering for Palestinian people.

5) The General Assembly is appreciative and hopeful about various leading initiatives undertaken by Islamic institutions and authorities in the region, which focused on the rejection of extremism and violence. These initiatives affirmed respect for diversity and differences, and recognized the role of the fundamental Christian component, its authenticity in the Arab civilization and the entire region, and called for preserving it. Moreover, the General Assembly hopes that these positions would be translated into practical steps, especially through books and educational curricula, in order to move to new prospects of partnership and cooperation.

6) The General Assembly heard the report of the Acting General-Secretary on the previous period, the actual situation of the Council and the future prospects of its work and message. The Assembly recalled that the Council, which is a place of convergence and cooperation among the Christians of the Middle East, is seeking Christian unity and the revitalization of the ecumenical dialogue that will be supported with joint initiatives among the churches, and cultivating Christian-Muslim relations, as well as spreading the ecumenical spirit amongst believers at vast grass-roots level.

7) The General Assembly expressed its rejection of all forms of extremism, terrorism, exclusion and “takfirism”.¹ It strongly condemned the genocides committed by the Turkish Ottoman Empire in 1915 against the Armenians, Syriacs, Chaldeans, Assyrians, Greeks and Christians in Mount Lebanon, and their uprooting in the land of their forefathers in addition to their displacement. The Assembly also affirmed the continual pursuit to build a safety net by working to provide elements for Christians’ resilience, to stop the bleeding of their migration from the Middle East, and to bring those who were displaced back to their

¹ Derived from the Arabic word *kafir* (meaning infidel), the term refers to one being accused of the dissent of a given Muslim doctrine an apostate, and therefore could be subject to punishment or death [*Editor’s Note*].

homes. The General Assembly proposed assigning for the new Executive Committee to form a delegation to visit the Islamic and Christian religious authorities and decision-making capitals in order to explain the situation of the Christians of the Middle East, and try to find sustainable solutions.

8) The General Assembly demanded the decision-makers at the local, regional and international levels:

- A. To intervene and stop war, to refrain from supplying weapons to terrorist groups, and to ensure a peaceful solution to the crisis in Syria that guarantees the country's unity and the free and safe coexistence among its various cultural and religious components within a civil state.
- B. To ensure support for the return of migrants and displaced persons to their homes in safety, especially the Christians of Mosul and Nineveh Plain in Iraq, who are the owners of the land and its indigenous people.
- C. To elect a president for the Lebanese Republic, without any further delay, so that order may return to the constitutional institutions, which is related to the stability of this message-country and its prosperity.
- D. To denounce the acts of genocide, ethnic and religious cleansing, and uprooting that Christians, along with other components of the Middle East, were exposed to and remain so till this very hour.
- E. To ensure that the Arab countries and the international community carry out their responsibilities in helping displaced persons and refugees, in providing the required support to them inside their countries and in host countries, as it's being done by the churches and church institutions, and in seeking to ensure their return to their homes as soon as possible, so that they enjoy a decent and secure life in equality with all their brothers and sisters in their countries.
- F. To reaffirm their support for the just cause of the Palestinian people and their right to statehood, and the return of Palestinian refugees to their land according to the resolutions of the United Nations.
- G. To end the irregular situation in the island of Cyprus, to achieve unity of the territory, and to protect the rights of all its citizens.
- H. To appeal to international authorities to intensify efforts for the release of all kidnapped persons, especially the two Metropolitans of Aleppo Boulous Yazigi and Yohanna Ibrahim, as more than three years have passed since their kidnapping, as well as priests and civilians, and to pray to God for their safe return soon.

9) At the closing session, the General Assembly elected four new Presidents, representing the four church families that make up the Council:

- For the Oriental Orthodox Family: His Holiness Patriarch Mor Ignatius Aphrem II, Patriarch of Antioch and All the East and Supreme Head of the Universal Syriac Orthodox Church
- For the Orthodox Family: His Beatitude Patriarch Youhanna X, Greek Orthodox Patriarch of Antioch and All the East
- For the Catholic Family: His Beatitude Patriarch Mor Louis Raffael I Sako, Chaldean Patriarch of Babylon
- For the Evangelical Family: Rev. Dr. Habib Badr, Presiding Pastor of the National Evangelical Union of Lebanon

The General Assembly also elected the members of the new Executive Committee, and concluded its work with the election of the new Secretary General of the Council for four years according to its by-laws, the Maronite Antonine religious Father Michel Jalakh.

Furthermore, the General Assembly elected the four incumbent Presidents of the Council as Honorary Presidents and they are: His Holiness Aram I, Catholicos of the Holy See of Cilicia of the Armenian Apostolic Church, His Beatitude Theophilos III, Greek Orthodox Patriarch of the Holy City of Jerusalem and All Palestine and Jordan, His Beatitude Mor Ignatius Youssef III Younan, Patriarch of Antioch and All the East of the Syrians for the Syriac Catholic Church, and His Eminence Bishop Munib Younan, Head of the Lutheran Church in Jordan and the Holy Land.

10) Acknowledgements and Congratulations

- A. The General Assembly acknowledged the role of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan and its historic efforts in the Hashemite custody of the Christian and Islamic holy places in the Holy Land, especially in Jerusalem, for the Church of the Holy Sepulcher belongs to Christians just as Al-Aqsa Mosque and Al-Haram Al-Sharif belong to Muslims, as this matter is of great importance in establishing the foundations of the dialogue of life in that blessed land. The General Assembly has also expressed its gratitude towards the officials in the Kingdom for their special interest in hosting this Assembly, acknowledging the role played by His Majesty King Abdullah II of Jordan for the sake of consolidating peace, spreading moderation, and protecting the freedom of worship enjoyed by the citizens in the Kingdom. This was affirmed to His Majesty by the Presidents of the Council and the Heads of the member churches through their meeting with him during the convention of the Assembly.
- B. The General Assembly praised the law passed by the Egyptian parliament in organizing the construction and renovation of churches, which preserves the dignity of Christians and their rights as citizens in this country.

- C. The General Assembly also expressed its thanks and gratitude to several churches from outside the region and global Christian organizations for having shared the hopes of the Council and its apprehensions, in support of its presence and message, and to maintain the Christian witness in the Middle East.
- D. The General Assembly congratulates all Muslims on the occasion of the blessed Eid al-Adha, asking the Almighty for it to be a call for goodness, blessing, peace, and safety in our Levantine region and the world.

11) In conclusion, the General Assembly of the Middle East Council of Churches stands in solidarity with the peoples of the region, asking for the divine mercy for the victims of violence, comfort for those in pain, and determination, courage and success for all those seeking to achieve justice and peace. The words of the Lord: Do not be afraid... "be of good cheer, I have overcome the world" (John 16: 33) remain a source of confidence, hope and constancy, so that we may stand firm in our faith and our witness to the Gospel of love and peace, and preserve the legacy of our fathers and grandfathers in our holy Levant.

"The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Ghost, be with you all. Amen." (2 Corinthians 13: 14)