1. The central committee of the World Council of Churches (WCC) meeting in Geneva from 15-21 June 2018 reiterates its grave concern regarding the alarming and rapidly deteriorating situation of Christians in the Middle East.

2. The Middle East is the cradle of Christianity, from the Holy Land to Lebanon, Syria, Iraq, Egypt and Cyprus where the apostles of Christ proclaimed the Good News to the world. Since the time of Jesus Christ Christians have lived in the Middle East and their significance cannot be reduced to mere minorities. The contribution of Christians to civilization, society and culture in the Middle East exceeds by far any effort of quantification. However, conflict, violence, discrimination, demolition of churches and forced displacement put the presence and witness of Christianity in the region of its birth at great risk. We hold all the churches of the region – especially those in Israel and Palestine, Iraq, Syria, Lebanon, Egypt and Cyprus – in our hearts and prayers as they confront the crisis facing their future presence and witness in the region.

3. The military defeat of ISIS in Iraq and Syria is not enough to secure a safe and sustainable return of Christians to their homes. Although the main physical centres of this extremist group have been destroyed, this does not mean that their ideology is defeated. After ensuring the safe return of the displaced people, and the reconstruction of their homes, communities and places of worship, the next challenge is to confront the drivers of radicalization and extremism through education for peace, human rights and respect for diversity, through strengthening the existing dialogue and mutual acceptance between Christians and Muslims, through cooperation in addressing the common challenges to social cohesion in the region, through equal citizenship rights, and through freedom from occupation and foreign interference.

4. In Iraq, the presence of Christians is drastically diminished. Identifying opportunities and addressing challenges for social cohesion in Iraq remain a priority in order for members of the remaining Christian community displaced from the Nineveh Plain to return and to envisage a sustainable future in their homeland. The central committee calls for the religious, governmental and political leaders of Iraq to lay the basis for common actions, to promote a shared narrative for peace and reconciliation in the country, and to work together for equal human rights and citizenship, peace, justice and democracy in the country. The WCC calls for continuing dialogue among the different sectors of Iraqi society to be accompanied by governmental action to reform the educational curriculum and for equality of citizenship and rights among all Iraqis so that not only physical security is provided but also legal, economic and social security to assure the sustainable return of displaced people and communities.

5. In Syria, the tragically continuing conflict negates the human dignity and rights of all Syrians. This conflict must end. All those involved in perpetuating it must stop. The people of Syria need peace, and liberation from the geopolitical competition and confrontation that has destroyed their country. With peace and the reconstruction of their country, Syrians need and deserve democracy, equal citizenship, and respect for their human rights. Efforts for healing and reconciliation can still provide a basis for peaceful multi-religious and multicultural communities in Syria, in which Christians can continue to contribute as an essential component of society. The central committee stands in solidarity with all the suffering people of Syria and pray that progress towards realization of their aspirations for peace, freedom and human
dignity and rights will be achieved through putting an end to this tragic war and engaging in the political process led by the UN in accordance with relevant UN Security Council resolutions.

6. The central committee recalls with heavy hearts the abduction five years ago of the archbishops of Aleppo, Youhanna Ibrahim and Paul Yazigi. We continue to pray for their safe return to their churches, their communities and their families, as a sign of hope for all the Christians of Syria and the region.

7. The central committee is also deeply concerned about the situation of the churches and people of Cyprus, still suffering from the division of their island by occupation, and with recent hopes for peace together as one island nation still unfulfilled. We call for an end to the occupation, and for the restoration of Cyprus as one nation for two communities. We call for the resumption of negotiations towards this objective, and for the preservation of the religious and cultural heritage of Christian community of the island. We commend and encourage the work of the Religious Track of the Cyprus Process in their inter-religious dialogue and cooperation for peace.

8. The central committee affirms that a new social pact is needed throughout the Middle East region – a common narrative that is developed and shared by all communities of the countries of the region based on an inclusive understanding of citizenship and human rights, constitutionally guaranteed, and under which all churches and faith communities, with their diverse ethnic, religious and cultural identities, can live and prosper in the love and grace given to all by God.

9. The central committee requests the general secretary to undertake further reflection on the diverse situations of the countries of the region, in particular as they impact upon the Christian communities and presence in those countries, and to present the results of this reflection to the WCC executive committee at its meeting in November 2018.