

Statement of the Interfaith Conference on Religious Solidarity and Social Cohesion in Iraq
Beirut, 12 December 2017

Now that the military eradication of the terrorist group ISIS has been officially announced, a victory made possible by the efforts and sacrifices of the army, police, security services, Popular Mobilization Forces, counterterrorism agency, air force, army aviation, Peshmerga forces and all types and formations of our armed forces, engineering and medical support, as well as logistics, and by the supporting tribes and citizens in Liberated areas that have cooperated with their army, a victory against the most powerful organization that destroyed the country and its infrastructure and committed appalling crimes against humanity, such as the capture of Yazidi, Christian and Turkmen women, the displacement of Christians, Shabaks and other communities, crimes of mass murder, the destruction of cultural heritage, churches, monasteries, mosques, hussainiyas, monastic cells, mausoleums, holy shrines and Tekyehs of all communities, now that an important page of liberation has been turned, all the sons of Iraq - country of civilizations and home of prophets, messengers and good and righteous saints of all communities – have to think about how to face this post-ISIS period and the deep conflicts left. This construction and stability period requires from each social group and each community to play a role and make a contribution to it.

Since religious clerics and institutions have had a great influence in guiding people to promote social cohesion through dialogue and communication between them, and in taking common positions to eliminate the effects of conflicts and disputes, representatives of different religions, religious schools and ethnicities, activists, academics, and persons interested in religious dialogue, with the support of the tireless efforts of the World Council of Churches, have come together to reflect on mechanisms to promote the social responsibility of religious institutions with their various identities and doctrines in order to inculcate the concepts of citizenship on the basis of diversity, promotion of equality, freedom of religion and belief, and solidarity among religions, and in order to emphasize the civilizational role of all Iraqi communities in building peace. Furthermore, the participants in this conference condemned the US president's decision to move the US embassy to Jerusalem, which he considered as the capital of Israel.

The participants have made these recommendations to the relevant authorities and institutions in the country:

At the governmental-legal level

1. Call upon the government to carry out its duties by establishing security, providing employment opportunities and services, assisting the affected persons, speeding up the return of displaced persons, compensating them, compensating the families of martyrs, widows and orphans, and providing services and treatment for the wounded and the disabled.
2. Work on the transitional justice project by involving all communities, recognizing the wounded memory of these groups, treating them, working to recover the Yezidi abductees from ISIS, supporting the development projects of displaced areas that were destroyed and implementing the safe and fair return projects.
3. Call for efforts to hold perpetrators accountable and to establish an Iraqi criminal court for crimes committed by ISIS in Iraq, whether genocide crimes, war crimes or crimes against humanity, if Iraq does not accede to the International Criminal Court.

4. Reinforce Article 14 of the Constitution, formally recognize all communities, establish equality among all citizens, thus guaranteeing the rights of all communities and preserving the social cohesion and the unity of the country, and repeal the item of minors' Islamization from article 26, paragraph 2, of the unified national card project.
5. Review the personal status law with respect to the rights of the communities and the principles of human rights.
6. Work on the preservation and registration of the cultural and civilizational heritage of all communities, restore destroyed religious sites and symbols of communities, even in areas where they no longer exist, and to preserve them as a common heritage of all citizens and of humanity.
7. Declare the holidays of the various communities as public holidays (one holiday at least for each community) and name public schools throughout the country with personalities of all religious, sectarian and national communities.
8. Facilitate the granting of a license to establish private schools for the communities.
9. Form an independent national committee for religious and cultural dialogue in which representatives of all communities coordinate their work with the Office of the Prime Minister.
10. Promote and support cultural and artistic development projects in order to contribute to bringing together different ethnic, cultural and religious groups.
11. Give a role to youth and women in development policies in the post-ISIS period to ensure their presence and status.
12. Criminalize extremist ideological groups supported both at home and abroad.
13. Call on Bagdad and Erbil to promote dialogue to resolve the outstanding problems between them.

At the media level

14. The media in general and the religious media in particular must adhere to professional and media ethics, not to incite sectarian strife, not to spread hate speech, not to offend the religious and national symbols of the communities, and support moderate discourse.
15. Replace the term minorities by communities in the media discourse. Communities shall mean the ethnic and religious groups that form the diverse societal fabric of Iraq.
16. Foster knowledge of the communities, ensure that their needs are met, and raise awareness of the role of all communities in the past and present in preserving the unity of the country and in the rich and varied national cultural heritage.
17. Cover meetings and mutual initiatives between religious representatives and leaders.

18. Produce media materials that foster knowledge of the communities, their cultural characteristics and the challenges they face, and about human rights, including children and women's rights, as well as rights of people with special needs.

At the education level

19. Foster knowledge of all religions and communities in the different education levels according to the vision of each community for itself, and focus on the civilizational role and contributions of each community to the history of the homeland, on belonging to the homeland and that all communities are authentic Iraqi communities.
20. Remove from the educational curricula all forms of extremist thought, discrimination and stereotypes against any cultural, religious or ethnic group.
21. Remove from the history syllabuses any content that lacks fidelity and include the role of all communities in building the country and its cultural heritage, focus in religious education syllabuses on the common values and values of living together, and in national education syllabuses, focus on citizenship which fosters diversity.
22. Review curricula in non-governmental religious schools.
23. Train teachers to contribute to enhancing the acceptance of others and dealing positively with diversity among students.
24. Develop school and university libraries with introductory books on communities, promote school and university activities which foster knowledge of the specificities of cultural and religious communities, and support initiatives of representatives of different religions to visit schools, institutes and colleges to carry out their humanitarian role.
25. Develop students' critical acumen, add a human rights course in school syllabuses, and raise students in a culture of dialogue and acceptance of diversity in schools and universities.
26. Establish a faculty of religions and diversity in all governorates.
27. Establish a committee of communities to visit the Ministry of Education in order to examine the texts and syllabuses, ensuring implementation of the above recommendations.

At the level of religious institutions and the role of religious leaders

28. Focus on the fact that religion is intended for the well-being of mankind and its primary role is human reform and the defense of human dignity and rights.
29. Focus on the fact that the role of religious leaders is to preserve the security of society, prevent strife, build confidence between the communities and social solidarity between religions, and work on the common good.

30. Deepen dialogue between religions by intensifying meetings, conferences and symposia, exchanging invitations to various places of worship and publicizing such work through various media outlets in order to send a message of peace and love to the recipients.
31. Adopt a moderate religious discourse as a basis for dialogue, train clerics for this discourse and inflexibly reject and stand against extremist religious discourse.
32. Call upon each religious community to purify its religious texts in order to strengthen their commonalities.
33. Recognize that extremism has a religious root in some texts and interpretations in our heritage and work to purge the legacy of its contents that feeds extremism and discrimination between people.
34. Respect the freedom of belief and faith of every person and adopt the Madinah Document as a model for this and reject any literature that slanders beliefs.
35. Call upon all religions to foster knowledge of themselves and their basic values.
36. Reinforce the Christian presence in the East, preserve the eastern churches, reinforce the presence of all communities, overcome obstacles to the return of the displaced Christians, Yazidis, Sabeans, Yarsanis, Shabaks and other communities, and work to bring them back to their regions.
37. Focus in religious discourse on the constructive positive elements and citizenship inclusive of diversity and promote the principle of equality of citizens in rights and duties.
38. We call upon the World Council of Churches to open and support the prospects for dialogue between East and West in order to clarify and correct what the extremist groups have corrupted.

This statement was issued on 11 and 12 December 2017 in Beirut at the commendable invitation of the World Council of Churches, with the participation of 42 people from the following religions and communities: Yazidism, Sabeian Mandaism, Christianity (The Old Eastern Church, the Assyrian Church of the East, the Armenian Orthodox Church, the National Evangelical Protestant Church, the Syriac Orthodox Church, the Greek Orthodox Church), and Islam (Sunnis and Shiites) as well as from Arab, Kurdish, Armenian, Assyrian, and Syriac communities, to reflect together on supporting the mechanisms of social cohesion in post-ISIS Iraq.