



World Council of Churches

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General Secretariat

Geneva, 3rd June 2019

World Council of Churches General Secretary Greeting to Muslims at Eid al-Fitr, 2019

Dear Muslim sisters and brothers,

I am glad to have this opportunity to greet the many Muslim friends and colleagues of the World Council of Churches, and indeed all Muslims, as you celebrate the festival of Eid al-Fitr.

Many Christians find that it is an enriching experience, and indeed a positive challenge to their faith, to observe something of how Muslims practise their faith through the month of Ramadan. For example, your commitment to fasting, to mutual forgiveness, and to remembering the needs of the poor and hungry, is a welcome reminder to Christians that these practices are also important to us in our own faith. In your observance of Ramadan there is a striking combination of fast and feast, of self-denial and of generous hospitality. This speaks eloquently to the wider world both of the abundant generosity of God and also of our need for self-discipline if we are to use God's gifts wisely and well.

And as we greet you warmly at this festive time and give thanks for all the good things that God gives us in our relationships with you, we are also aware of the many difficult challenges in the world that we are surely called to face together on the basis of our shared commitment to justice and peace for all people. In recent months, there has been a disturbingly repetitive pattern of murderous attacks on people worshipping in their holy places. Time and again we at WCC have raised our voices to condemn these brutal acts and to express our solidarity with traumatized and grieving communities, thinking especially of the Jewish community in Pittsburgh, the Muslim community in Christchurch, and the Christian communities of Sri Lanka. But there is a danger that our words of condemnation and solidarity, however sincerely intended, will start to sound routine and hollow unless we are serious about asking ourselves what we can do in response to such horrific events. In particular, we at WCC are keen to explore with Muslim colleagues and partner organisations what we can do together for the sake of justice and peace.

Although every community will naturally feel a particular responsibility to protect and support the most vulnerable and needy among its own members – and this is certainly an important aspect of our work at WCC – let us at the same time all strive to keep our hearts open to the suffering of other communities. Let us beware of the temptation to perpetuate narratives of competitive suffering in which our community is always the most victimized, so that we become trapped in unselfcritical attitudes of suspicion and recrimination towards each other. If one of the tests of the greatness of a nation is how

well it cares for its vulnerable minorities it is surely a major responsibility for the leaders of majority religious communities to intercede and intervene in the life of their nation on behalf of such minorities, to speak up for those of other communities who have no voice, to defend those who are most vulnerable.

The good news is that we already see encouraging signs of Muslims and Christians going out beyond the boundaries of their communities and together serving the good of all their neighbours. I think of senior Muslim and Christian religious leaders who have responded to the terrible violence in their homeland by working together as 'Faith Friends' for interreligious harmony, and prioritizing work with young people to take their vision forward. I think of the gifted and dedicated Muslim colleague who gives generously of his time to serve as an adviser in our WCC programme 'Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace'. I could mention many other examples, but above all I think of the privilege of attending the meeting in Abu Dhabi in February this year at which the Grand Imam of al-Azhar, Ahmad Al-Tayyeb, and His Holiness Pope Francis made their historic declaration on human fraternity. They could not have been clearer in their call to Muslims, Christians and indeed all people, to embrace reconciliation and fraternal cooperation for the sake of peace. Now it is up to us all to make it a reality.

As-salaamu alaykum! Peace be with you! And may God help us to work together as peacemakers in the world.



Rev. Dr Olav Fykse Tveit
General Secretary