

## **King Takes interfaith effort to the world stage**

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AMMAN (JT) — His Majesty King Abdullah on Thursday stressed the need to activate interfaith dialogue to build bridges of tolerance and understanding between cultures, a Royal Court statement said.

In his address at the European People's Party (EPP) summit, delivered in the presence of 20 presidents and prime ministers, EU institution chiefs and opposition leaders, along with HRH Prince Ghazi, His Majesty outlined Jordan's efforts in interfaith dialogue, stressing the need for joint efforts to spread the values of peace and tolerance.

"We have systematically worked on easing intra- and inter-religious tensions, which pose a serious threat to our collective security," he said.

His Majesty highlighted the 2004 Amman Message initiative, which is "intended to spread harmony and love among the world's 1.5 billion Muslims. And it has been supported by recognised religious scholars throughout the Muslim world".

The Monarch, who returned home later Thursday, also referred to "A Common Word" initiative.

"Through this open letter by 138 Muslim scholars to the leaders of the Christian churches, we sought to promote Muslim-Christian harmony."

The letter calls for "Love of God" and "Love of the Neighbour", which is shared by the three monotheistic religions, "as a joint platform for peaceful relations between Muslims and Christians".

"This year, Jordan took the message of religious peace and love to the whole world. We did so by initiating "World Interfaith Harmony Week", which will be held the first week of February each year."

His Majesty said it will be "a voluntary occasion for people to express their own religious teachings about tolerance, respect for others and peace", hoping it will "help more people come together".

"I also look forward to cooperating with the EU to promote this initiative, by sponsoring activities that recognise countries which take part in it," the King said.

At the conclusion of the session, the EPP, the largest bloc in the European Parliament, consisting of 72 parties from 39 European countries, adopted a statement to encourage interfaith dialogue.

The statement used the words of the "A Common Word" open letter calling for tolerance of difference, mutual respect and fairness.

"Let our differences not cause hatred and strife between us. Let us vie with each other only in righteousness and good works," the statement said.

In his address, His Majesty also pointed to the importance of joint cooperation to achieve peace in the Middle East on the basis of a two-state solution, as "nothing less can bring the regional, and indeed the global stability, we need in today's dangerous era".

"For Palestinians, it is a secure future, in an independent, viable and sovereign Palestinian state on their own national soil," he noted.

"For Israelis, it is the real security that acceptance and normal relations bring, not just with immediate neighbours, but with 57 Arab and Muslim countries, one-third of the UN."

"For the Middle East, it is the security of a region at peace, able to devote resources to development and progress, and for the global community, it is the security of a global alliance for moderation and justice."

The Monarch praised Europe's role in supporting negotiations and helping Palestinians build their institutions, calling for a new activity to address the rapid changes.

"If negotiations do not succeed, the two-state solution, the only solution that can work, might not be possible," he warned.

"If that hope is killed, we can anticipate much more vicious warfare. Europe, the US and other countries have already been dragged into regional conflicts. New catastrophic scenarios would only drag the world in deeper."

The King highlighted the importance of economic cooperation, stressing that a "healthy economic balance in the Euro-Med neighbourhood" is a central issue.

Referring to the Arab region's largely young population, he said "an opportunity-rich future is one of the most effective answers to extremist agitation".

"We know the way ahead. There must be reform; there must be effective, innovative development assistance; there must be much more direct investment. For this we need Europe's continued, active partnership."

The King said Jordan's advanced status with the EU will help "create opportunity and boost integration with European standards and structures".

Also on Thursday, King Abdullah underlined the importance of taking an immediate and effective action to resolve the Palestinian-Israeli conflict on the basis of the two-state solution.

At a meeting with EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs Catherine Ashton in Brussels yesterday, King Abdullah stressed that the two-state solution is perceived by the international community as the sole path to bringing about peace and stability in the region.

The King said that the alternative to seeking progress towards this solution is further tensions and conflicts that would hinder efforts to achieve security and stability in and outside the region and pose threats to the US, European and international strategic interests.

King Abdullah underscored the need to launch serious and effective talks between the Palestinians and Israelis according to clear terms of reference to arrive at the two-state formula.

The King warned that continuing to adopt the current approach to crisis management will maintain the status quo, bringing about more tensions and violence.

During the meeting, attended by officials from the European Commission, the Monarch praised the EU stances that perceive the establishment of an independent and viable Palestinian state living side by side with Israel as the way to achieve peace in the Middle East.

His Majesty called for fostering international efforts to build a suitable atmosphere to launch peace talks and ensure their success through halting all Israeli unilateral measures, particularly the construction of settlements, stressing the need for negotiations to be based on international resolutions.

King Abdullah and Ashton discussed means to enhance cooperation between Jordan and the EU in peace efforts as well as at the trade and investment levels.

The King also met with businesspeople and chief executives of a number of Belgian and international companies to encourage them to invest in Jordan and increase economic and investment exchange.

The Monarch met separately with BESIX Chief Executive Officer Johan Beerlandt, Chief Executive Officer of Barco NV Eric Van Zele and President and CEO of International General Electric Ferdinando Nani Beccalli-Falco. He highlighted the Kingdom's efforts to provide an atmosphere that encourages investment.

The King briefed the top executives on mega-projects that the Kingdom is planning to implement in vital sectors including water, energy and transport.

Also during his visit to Belgium, His Majesty on Wednesday met with King Albert II, President of the European Council Herman van Rompuy, President of the European Commission José Manuel Barroso, President of Belgium's Chamber of Representatives André Flahaut and several Belgian deputies.

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