

Religions for Peace

Press Release:

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Middle East and North Africa Religious Leaders Reject Violence

Commit to Cooperation among Muslims, Christians and Jews to Build Peace

Marrakech, Morocco -- Senior religious leaders from across the Middle East and North Africa rejected violence and called for deepened multi-religious collaboration as the region undergoes historic transformations. They committed to stand in solidarity with all vulnerable communities, to advocate for full religious freedoms across the region and to call on all religious believers to become a united force to help ensure that governments honour the full rights, protect and serve all of their citizens without exception.

The religious leaders—coming from Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Morocco, Palestine, Saudi Arabia, Sudan, Syria, Tunisia, and Turkey—were convened by the *Religions for Peace* Middle East and North Africa Council, a body led by religious leaders from the region. They were joined by representatives from the United Nations (UN), the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) and the Islamic Education Scientific and Cultural Organization (ISESCO).

The participants reiterated the urgent need for the historic faiths in the region—Islam, Christianity and Judaism—to work together for the common good of the people in the region. Respecting their religious differences, they pledged to work together to promote and protect the fundamental dignity and religious and other rights of all people, including those who are not followers of their historic faiths.

Calling on the religious communities to “unite on the basis of shared values,” the President of the United Nations General Assembly H.E. Nassir Abdulaziz Al-Nasser noted in his message that this was the only way to “build flourishing communities committed to a just peace across the region.”

The religious leaders were united in their call for the rejection of the misuse of religion as well as their respect for religious freedom across the region. H.E. Ufuk Gokcen, Ambassador of the OIC to the United Nations, noted that “the commitments of the religious leaders could be helpfully aligned with the recent political consensus achieved in the United Nations Human Rights Council resolution 16/18. That political consensus—endorsed by the gathered religious leaders—recognizes that the incitement to imminent violence based on religion or belief should be criminalized.

The Director General of ISESCO, Dr. Abdulaziz Othman Altwaijri, condemned the manipulation of religion for political ends. He cautioned against those who justified violence in the name of religion by misinterpreting scriptures out of their historical contexts. In relation to violence against religious communities, the religious leaders committed to stand in solidarity with all vulnerable religious communities and to advocate for their protection. Terming the *Religions for Peace* MENA Council as ‘needed’ in the region, Dr. Altwaijri asked everyone to support it and pledged the cooperation of ISESCO.

Prof. Mohammed Sammak from Lebanon called for the development of a Muslim-Christian “contract of mutual care.” Prof. Sammak, a Co-President of *Religions for Peace* International, stated that the destiny of the Muslims and Christians in Middle East and North Africa are inseparable. He noted with alarm the dwindling population of Christians in the region, and called on the Muslims in the region to help reverse this trend by standing in solidarity with Christians and advocating governments to protect them. The religious leaders pledged to help the Muslim, Christian and Jewish communities in the region to build contracts of mutual care.

The religious leaders pledged themselves to help develop and support a notion of “citizenship” needed across the region and called on all religious believers to become a united force to help ensure that governments honor the full rights, protect and serve all of their citizens without exception. They noted that this must especially be true in Jerusalem, a city holy to the three Abrahamic religions. They called on all governments to achieve a just peace in Jerusalem and the Holy Land and pledged their support in achieving it. The High Representative of the United Nations Alliance of Civilizations, H.E. Jorge Sampaio, stated that strengthening inter-religious dialogue in the MENA region “is one of the most important ways to secure a just peace and dignity for the people of the region.”

Religions for Peace International Secretary General Dr. William Vendley stated that “the religions of the region can and must help to shape the common future of the region.” “Religious leaders across the world are in solidarity with the *Religions for Peace* MENA Council and they will work actively to support its leadership in protecting human dignity and advancing the common good in the region.”