

VERANSTALTUNGSBEITRAG

Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung e.V.

AUSLANDSBÜRO JORDANIEN

NOVEMBER 22-23 2014

Joan Domingo

DR. OTMAR OEHRING

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Conference: "Christians and the Arab Spring -2"

Event: Conference

Date, Place: 22nd-23rd of November, 2014, Le Meridien Hotel, Amman – Jordan

Organization: Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung Jordan Office (KAS), Al Quds Center for Political Studies, Danmission

1. Program

Saturday, November 22nd, 2014

Welcome Speeches

Mr. Oraib El Rantawi

Director
Al Quds Center for Political Studies
Amman – Jordan

Dr. Otmar Oehring

Resident Representative
Konrad Adenauer Stiftung
Amman Office – Jordan

Mr. Naveed Bek

Member of the advisory board of
Danmission

Session 1: Christian of Iraq- A Future Outlook

Session 2: Future of Christians of Syria

Session 3: Christians of Lebanon and Challenges and Opportunities of Consensus

Session 4: Christians of Egypt after their Revolution

Sunday, November 23rd, 2014

Session 5: Christians of Jordan and Palestine

**Session 6: The West and Christians of the Orient... European Readings in the Crisis
Challenging Christians of the Region**

Session 7: Discussion of the Final Communique and Recommendations

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2. Objective

The Arab Spring has come as a blessing to some Arabs, but to the Arab Christians it is a frightening consequence. The Arab Christians have been facing many problematic challenges concerning their status, rights and freedom. Emerging democracies that came about during and after the Arab Spring have resulted in dramatic migrations and forceful displacement among the Christian community in the Middle East. Till today, in some Arab countries, where Christians are a minority, they are still discriminated in valid constitutions and legislations. Christians, especially in Syria and Iraq have not only encountered forced migration and displacement but mass killings as well, with extremist groups targeting churches and clergymen, which is known to be a violation of human rights. While this has become evident to the Christians around the Middle East, through conferences and meetings in which hundreds of national Christian figures attended, the Christians themselves have realized that there are also problems among the Christian community, which include the gap between the church and the clergymen, the ongoing disagreements among the Christian divisions and the youth generation. This being the case, participants of the conference prolonged discussions and recommendations in order to reach common ground between the Christians in different countries. Therefore, the question still remains what is the best solution for Christians to contribute to, the transitional phase towards democracy, each of their countries are going through by dismissing discrimination and by working together all at the same time.

To further discuss the problems and in order to propose a common solution to

these exacerbating problems, Konrad Adenauer- Stiftung (KAS) Jordan Office in cooperation with Al-Quds Center for Political Studies and Danmission organized a two days forum. The objective of the Christian and the Arab Spring conference is to build up the largest Christian-Christian consensus and create a road map for a better future for the Christians. This roadmap includes a declaration called "Amman Declaration," which leans towards a civil democratic state, a country of all citizens with no discriminations.

Welcome Speeches

At the start of the conference, Dr. Otmar Oehring, Resident Representative of KAS Jordan office, Mr. Oraib El Rantawi, Director of Al Quds Center and Mr. Naveed Bek, Member of the advisory board of Danmission, welcomed all participants and thanked them for their cooperation and abundant contribution. During the speeches, the status of Christians, their rights and freedom during and after the Arab spring was discussed. They opened the issue concerning the phenomena of migration and displacement of Christians in Arab countries and discussed the creation of a roadmap for a better future among the Christians from different spectrums. In addition, it was accentuated that safe havens for Christians is not a solution anymore and a more permanent consensus among the Christians and the Muslims should be developed.

Session 1: Christians of Iraq- A Future Outlook

The first debate of the day was opened by Dr. Haidar Said, Iraqi Academician and Political researcher, he started by emphasizing on the lack of political participation of Iraqi Christians in Iraq. He underlined the decrease of

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demographic figures of Christians in Iraq and specifically the city of Mosul since the "Islamic conquering." The speaker recommended that the state of Iraq take back its role in terms of protecting its citizens, including the Christians, who are also Iraqi nationals. Given the fact that there is a decrease in political participation, the speaker stressed on citizenship as a guarantee for their political participation. In addition, he recommended putting an end to any discrimination of identity in order for them to easily create a Christian governate, in areas where there is a high density of Christians.

The second speaker further expressed his thoughts on Mosul and the reasons behind why Christians will not be able to return to their hometown. He stressed that Christians of Mosul have lost confidence after some mosques called for either the expulsion of Christians or conversion if they are not able to pay the taxes to stay.

The city of Mosul was further discussed by other speakers all agreeing that the Christians cannot simply go back to their hometown knowing that they were deliberately targeted and their property was taken away from them. However to some, the solution would be to have the Christians return to Mosul and fight just as the resistance do in other cities. One speaker pointed out, how this could be a dangerous statement, bringing the Christians back to Mosul, but they indicated the fact that it is a necessary move and hopefully a solution, even if it takes time. Moreover other speakers shared the same view of Muslims helping the Christians reach their goal and help them fight since they are all fighting the same kind of extremism.

Session 2: Future of Christians of Syria

The second debate focused on the problems of Syria transitioning into a democracy and how this affected Christians politically and legally. The first speaker began by mentioning that extremist forces in Syria have kept Christians from participating politically and he expressed the relationship between the regime and the people. He revealed that there is a controversy concerning the gap between the church and the Christians, who believe that the church do not give them guarantees of protection. However the Christians do not only feel that way about the church but the regime as well, the speaker stated that, they believe no one has such guarantees, neither the church nor the regime for protection, equal citizenship of everyone regardless their religion or sect. The speaker also pointed out that the Christians want a democratic state that protects rights and freedom and he asserted that all Syrians need to enjoy this kind of democratic state. He recommended constitutionalizing the system of rights, to reconsider some of the laws and to criminalize all sorts of violence. He added that citizens need to reconsider the school curricula, spreading social culture and democratization, in addition to media and the information it feeds to its citizens. However, the speaker concluded that this could only be done if the citizens work together and cooperate with all Syrians to come up with a unified solution for a united Syria.

An Iraqi represented responded to the first speaker affirming that the situation in Syria is not that different from Iraq. He expressed that Iraq too has witnessed abuse from its regime and today from ISIS as well. People who were not forced out of their homes end up leaving nevertheless because of fear from either the so-called ISIS or the regime. He raised another issue concerning military

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recruitment, which is also another reason for the Christian migration. He acknowledged that there were about 26% Christians in Iraq and now that number has dropped to 6% after the migration because of military recruitment, but he also emphasized that this touches upon all Iraqi citizens regardless of their religion and not just the Christians.

Another speaker voiced his concern regarding democracy, he stated that Arabs sing the praises of democracy and have the vision of a democratic state but in their history there has never been a democracy. Furthermore, he responded to the last speaker about military recruitment and how this affects the youth the most. The youth are given an ultimatum, either they join the military or they will not be protected. This being the case, the youth are scared and their parents are fearful for them thus the only choice they would feel is right is to run away.

The head of the Syrian human rights council reminded the delegates that the aim of this conference is to come up with recommendations. He stated that Christian Syrians have common ambitions and that is to receive a state of citizenship. He confessed that even if there are many Christians who support the regime in their hearts they are really not with the regime. With this being said the speaker continued by offering his recommendations, he suggested that citizens need to organize themselves to establish a "military Syrianic council," which would have light weapons in order for them to protect the Christians living in the villages and preserving themselves. He added, if Christians want a state of citizenship they need to have educational maturity and diversity which lies in the interests of all Syrians. According to the speaker, if Christians

want to get what they need then they need to work with all Syrians and not just among themselves.

Session 3: Christians of Lebanon and Challenges and Opportunities of Consensus

The first speaker of this session, Emile Rahmeh, Member of Parliament, discussed the Christians of Lebanon, their experience and status in the country. Initially, he stated that security is better than a promised democracy and given Lebanon's history one can see that national sovereignty comes first. He referred back to history when Lebanon became a place of refuge for the Palestinians, Iraqis and now the Syrians, especially for the Christians of those countries. The MP underlined that they have to have one line of defence to protect, thus they have to put all their differences aside and work together. He suggested that if there is dialogue between them then the relationship with the Muslims will be the key to stability. Lastly, he added that this stability will help with reconciliation steps, building up a real equal living, and development in every aspect including education.

A fellow MP, Antoine Zahra added and portrayed Lebanon as the first oasis for religious freedom. He stressed that Christians, since the beginning of history fought for their right to live and their right to freedom and that is why freedom to believe is protected in Lebanon. He explained that the Taif agreement, that the country upholds, has led the foundation to a constitutional matter for a diversified community. The speaker expressed his concern about what the delegates thought about democracy. He questioned what democracy was if it does not respect diversity, he argued that people need to follow democracy by starting to accept one another no matter what sect or religion. He added that the essence of democracy is to accept its

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results and this is their commitment to Lebanon. The MP believes that reconciliation is possible and this could be done if they could give back citizenship to all those who are originally Lebanese.

Another speaker- also representing Lebanon- expressed his sadness concerning the Arab Spring and its burden on the Arab Christians. He stated that the countries these Christians come from are holding up short in the sense of rights and freedom, even if it is not a dictatorship anymore it shifted to a full on chaos of displacement and migration. He voiced his concern regarding the fact that no other Arab constitution, other than Lebanon, protects the rights of Christians thus he suggested that roadmaps and legislations are needed especially to those belonging to minorities. Lastly he suggested that, they have to overcome the Christian-Christian conflict and come together to overcome the problem as a whole in order to find a solution that unifies all.

During the discussion it was elaborated by different speakers that the situation in Lebanon differs immensely compared to other Arab countries, however most of the speakers agree that the situation in Lebanon needs to be maintained and given the fact that there are a lot of differences amongst the Christians, Lebanon needs to withstand any changes.

Session 4: Christians of Jordan and Palestine

This session was opened by Father Rifat Badr, introducing Jordan as an oasis of security. He stated that the head of the churches and him truly believe that the leaders of Jordan are wise and that what happens to the citizens of Jordan happens to all. He mentions that Christians work together with other

fractions to support their country. He added that the growing extremism in Jordan, which is supported by 7% of Jordanians, is not a source of concern and it is not terrorism against Christianity but humanity all in all. The Father also raised concerns regarding education and its lack of diverse curriculums. He stressed on the fact that students need to learn about Christian education and how some school deprive the Christians from learning their own religion. He argues that teaching Christian education helps both religions in every aspect including intermarriage, since it is very popular in the Arab region.

The following speaker, a professor at Beit Lehem University, acknowledged that the Christians in Palestine are living in a type of stability, unlike the Christians in Syria or Iraq. However the professor explained how they have been frightened in the last year because of the changes happening in occupied Palestine, which led to an increase in migration and he admits the number of migration is higher in Christians that it is for Muslims. The speaker explains that Christians in Palestine are usually in the middle class and for that reason they migrate. The speaker also raises the issue of Christian education, he stated that the Muslims know nothing about Christian culture or history, which helps the Christians feel like they do not exist or belong, this also helps with the migration.

The next speaker countered the professor, he stated that there is no discrimination in Palestine against the Christians; it is the Christians themselves who are living in some kind of estrangement not willing to participate in official bodies in Palestine. The delegate explained that the reason for this is, there are low incomes in those areas and the Christians believe that people who participate in security do not have the

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education that is why they refrain from participating.

Another speaker suggested an increase in the proliferation of the children, increase the number of Christians. Furthermore, he emphasized on the segregation of religion from the state, separating religion from politics.

The last participant talked about the effect the Arab Spring had on the Christians. He explained that after the Christians found out the state wanted to change citizenship from civil to religious the Christians started to think of the Arab Spring as a condemnation. He further clarified that a good number of Christians do not have the pride to be an Arab anymore that some start to feel like they were Aramaic.

Session 5: Christians of Egypt after their Revolution

In the beginning of the session the floor was open to Mr. Hani Daniel, a political researcher, he began by stating that some Christians, who were selected by the state and the church, were participating politically but there is still no political maturity in Egypt and they are not unified. He explained the political situation in Egypt during the presidency of Mohammad Morsi and the coop which led to the division in Egyptian society. However he clarified that after the revolution people started to have a general objective, people wanted to restore the states and allow citizenship for all citizens with no discrimination. The speaker spoke about hopes of the next parliament passing and approving laws to protect these rights. He then moved to clarify more on the Draft law, which he stated, was not the problem but their culture itself, a culture going back years and years, he argued. The political analyst suggested for people to focus

more on the rule of law, along with the rule of punishment, he explained that there are many victims who have not received justice or compensation for crimes committed by perpetrators who, the state did not punish or even investigate. The speaker recommended to ratify the law of civil state in line with the requirements of the Christian churches and to ask the media to prevent from airing religious comments and stories that stir the society in a sectarian manner. His recommendation for his last point about culture was to deal with curricula in a better way and to include courses on human rights that also deal with pluralism.

Many participants were eager to start the discussion, the delegate who began was a fellow Egyptian, who spoke about how important participation and contribution is in society. He stressed on the importance of the church politically participating, in order for them to push for freedom of religion and absolute freedom. He expressed profoundly how the January 25th revolution was their golden days and that they have to change their religious discourse, culture, educational curricula and the hatred that exists in Egyptian society. He ended by calling out to all Egyptians and not just to the Christians.

Some speakers concurred that Christians and Muslims do not have a problem coexisting in Egypt, there are Muslims and Christians in every area completely diversified and one of the speaker gave history as the reason for this. One speaker further explained that the Muslims now see the Christians as nationalistic and even though there are problems with the curricula, they came up with what he believed was a very good constitution, which allows Christians and non-Muslims to be included in the parliament and laws. He strongly recommended that all Christians in Egypt

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participate political, run for election and take part in the management of the state in order to feel a sense of belonging. His last recommendation was to focus wholly on education and culture in order for people to accept one another and create a more peaceful Egypt.

Session 6: The West and Christians of the Orient... European Readings in the Crisis Challenging Christians of the Region

At the start of the session, Danish professor and researcher, Dr. Niels Valdemar Vinding compared the west to the Arab nations in terms of division and how Europe too has a diversity of Christian Arabs. However, he pointed out that the Palestinian-Israeli conflict deepens the divide among the Christians in Europe and some in Arab countries. He additionally raised the issue of American intervention and how they keep playing the game of luck when it comes to the Middle East. He also acknowledged the role of the pope and his limited power to make a difference, but the speaker assures the rest of the participants that the Christians have the pope's full attention and that the pope condemns the brutality done to the Christians in the Middle East. The speaker highlighted that the migration of the Christians have not gone unnoticed, the Danish parliament called for a hearing concerning the prosecution of Christians around the Arab world. The professor provided options for the west to do which is to support moderate Muslims, who would like to see Christians be part of their community, including King Abdullah. He believes that these are the voices European governments should support in order to help the Christians. Dr. Niels urges international church institutions to strengthen their relations with groups who support other Christians and aid them and in addition to, Christian's

participating politically in order to receive more attention.

The second speaker of this session, Dr. Otmar Oehring, referred to the west as secularized, he explained that religion has become a very private issue but people do enjoy religious freedom. He pointed out that being Christian in Germany does not mean that people are interested in religious affairs they are just not affiliated with religion. Dr. Otmar assured that they have always been well informed about the situation of the Christians in the Middle East but he admits that the situation has always been by far more complex. The speaker explains that they have been discussing with Iraqi priests the situation of the Christians in Iraq and if they should come back, help them resettle or flee. However he stressed on speaking about human dignity and how this kind of decision should solely be made by any civil person.

After the last speaker, the floor was open for discussion, the first speaker expressed his concerns about the west and their ability to listen to what the citizens have to say. He accounted that, the Arab league needs the west to convey to their people the situation of the Christians in the Middle East. He urged them to be their voice and ask for rescue, but not just humanitarian but to preserve the Christian presence.

The next delegate assures the speakers that they have the utmost respect for the churches in the west however they do not trust the misleading political institutions in the west. He criticizes them for being too ambiguous towards the situation of the Christians. The speaker speculated that the west supports everyone and hates everyone and for that reason he asks the west to leave them alone.

Another delegate countered the last speaker, he argued that the participants were blaming the wrong people and they,

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the Christians do not understand the west anymore. He expressed his surprise at the western Christians who have fallen silent during the brutality against the Christians. He expected the people of the west to protest against what is happening to the Christians in the east, in addition to the Muslims who say are on the Christians' side.

The last delegate concurred with the previous speaker, he exonerated the west by stating that they have sacrificed enough with the wars they have encountered during the years and the success of separating religion from state. The speaker asks if it is possible for the western churches, or even willing, to support eastern churches in order for them to create a unified entity.

Session 7: Recommendations

The recommendation was to pass the Amman Declaration, which is a roadmap for a better future for Christians in Arab countries. Participants agreed to urge all their governments and parliaments to legalize and constitutionalize laws that protect the existence of Christians, their rights, freedom and beliefs. They recommend inviting all their government to discuss and reconsider the schools curricula. In addition, to enrich the educational programs of their schools in which freedom, justice, diversity and tolerance is taught. The delegates

advocated encouraging their governments to monitor the media discourse in order to fight cultural hatred, incitement of violence and religious indifference.

Conclusion

The participants agreed on an exceedingly fruitful and prolonged discussion that helped all participants express his views and concerns regarding the issue of Christians in their countries. The participants have heard all the views and voices of every delegate thus what is left is to apply the recommendations that was agreed among them.

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