

Amman Declaration

A Roadmap for a better Future for Christians in Arab Countries

Amman, Jordan, November 2014

During the period from September 2013-November 2014, hundreds of national Christian figures such as clergymen, politicians, members of parliament, and human rights activists from Egypt, Iraq, Syria, Jordan, Lebanon, and Palestine met in a series of regional and national conferences. They discussed challenges encountered by Christians of the Orient and Arab countries at this very sensitive phase which witnesses an organized systematic targeting of such a group that is a major component of the region's nations and that always played a pioneering founding role in building this region's civilizations, culture, economy, and intellectual and social achievements.

During these meetings and conferences, participants noticed that Christians' status, rights, and freedoms vary from one Arab country to another depending on their political systems and history of creation and development. Participants had prolonged discussions on the challenges Christians are encountering—especially in Syria and Iraq as the phenomena of mass killing and forceful displacement and targeting of churches and clergymen has increased in an unprecedented manner as well as all that can be considered war crimes and crimes against humanity that are refused by all Abrahamic religions and earthly laws because they are obvious violations of all basic human rights. They also thoroughly discussed the challenges faced by Christians in Palestine, Jerusalem, and the Holy Land where they have been targeted, discriminated against, deprived of their rights, and forcefully displaced by the Israeli authorities in the context of their “Judaization” of the state and occupation of the land which they call the “promised land.”

Participants also discussed the phenomena of migration and forceful displacement that increased dramatically amongst Christians in these Arab countries in this past decade. These phenomena have become very intense since the uprisings and revolutions that broke out in the region in the context of what is so-called the Arab Spring. Participants expressed their deep fear of the continuation of these phenomena which threaten the region with the loss of one of its most important historical components and the deprivation of its peoples and societies of their pluralism that have always enriched its heritage, culture, and spirit. Participants considered the responsibility of stopping these phenomena and the work to get Christian immigrants and Christians that were displaced back to their countries of origin as a big responsibility which is the responsibility of governments in the first place, not to mention the responsibility of Arab societies with their religious, political, partisan, civil, cultural, and national components, stressing the necessity of not accepting the common proverb “that which happened was bound to happen,” and that the road of immigration is only one way.

During participants' analysis of the challenges that embraced the present of Arab, Armenian, Assyrian, and Chaldean Christians in the region, they agreed on the following:

First: The failure of the Arab national state to build the civil, democratic, and pluralistic “state of equal citizenry” was a crucial cause to create the atmospheres of discrimination against major components of society. Christians in these countries suffered different types of discrimination on

the legal and constitutional levels and the level of political participation and representation. They have less rights and freedoms, specifically at the religious level.

Second: Participants acknowledged that the various components of the region suffered a lot due to the recession that took over the region for more than three decades under the regimes of corruption and dictatorship. They all agreed there is no Christian solution for the Christian problem and that the solution for the region's problems is represented by the involvement of our peoples and societies with all their strength and the peaceful striving to spread the values of democracy, pluralism, and human rights; and to build the modern civil democratic state that treats all its citizens equally—men and women—regardless of their colors, races, religions, denominations, and political and intellectual affiliations—a state that respects the individual and group rights of its citizens.

Third: Participants expressed their complete rejection of all attempts of different communities in our countries and societies (for different reasons and goals) to portray Christians as a negative component in the movement of reform and change that is taking place in the region. They also refused attempts to represent Christians as back scene supporters of dictatorial and corrupt governments and regimes as Christians of these regions were always advocates of renaissance, enlightenment, and national unity in their countries and societies and they were always major contributors in building their countries' cultures, civilizations, economies, and social structures.

Fourth: Participants noticed that Arab societies in the past three decades particularly became less tolerant to some of their components—especially under the wide spread of extremist interpretations of the rules and teachings of the pure Islamic religion and the spread of phenomena of exclusion, takfirism, and disrespect of the others and their rights. Unfortunately, these phenomena rose and were aggravated under the sight of most, if not all the governments of these countries and sometimes with the encouragement of these governments, without taking any actions to perpetuate the values of tolerance, co-existence, recognition of others, respecting religious, intellectual, and political pluralism, and standing against the schools of hyperbole and extremism in belief and practice.

Fifth: Participants discussed the ascendance of political Islam movements in different Arab countries and societies. They stressed the necessity of differentiating between these movements and not to put them all in one basket. They reached consensus on the necessity of fighting and excluding takfirist currents not only because they target Christians, but also they target all the different components of our societies and peoples, in addition to seriously damaging the Arab identity and the image of Islam. As they also decided to invite currents that are more moderate to adopt a clear discourse towards the Christian component in the region and to stay away from ambiguity and prevarication when talking about Christian rights, freedoms, and participation and representation. This methodology is no longer effective in promoting "Christian citizenry" or in fighting currents of hyperbole and extremism.

Sixth: Participants expressed their strong refusal of all the miserable attempts by some extremist and exclusionary bodies to consider Christians secondary "minorities," immigrant "communities," or "Dhimmi's." These Christians are the salt of this earth and they are the people of its civilization,

culture, and heritage and their “effective equal citizenry” in their country and society is unnegotiable, non-tradable, uncompromising, undivided, and non-detracted.

Seventh: Participants expressed their condemnation of all attempts to treat Arab, Armenian, Assyrian, and Chaldean Christians of the region as an extension of western countries, especially when Christians in this region are treated according to the stances and policies of western countries. Participants recalled some bright pages in the history of this region and its people’s struggle for independence and national liberation where many Christian leaders and thinkers led movements of liberation and independence from colonialism. These Christians were pioneers in the movements of renaissance and enlightenment and lived in historical eras of brotherhood and co-existence with this region’s various components.

Eighth: While reviewing the effective constitutions and legislations in a number of Arab countries, participants noticed that these constitutions and legislations varied in the level of recognizing and guaranteeing the rights and freedoms of Christians as individuals, denominations, and groups. The recognitions of these constitutions vary between complete denial of these rights, not explicitly mentioning this component, and detracting its rights and freedoms. Participants stressed the crucial importance to revise and amend these constitutions and legislations to conform to the need of constitutionalizing and legalizing the concept of “effective equal citizenry,” and to conform to the international standards and values of human rights, especially those pertaining to the rights of religious minorities.

Ninth: Participants confirmed that Christian communities in the region are just like all other social components in the region. They have intellectual, denominational, political, and social pluralism. They stressed their rejection of considering these Christian communities as being all the same and they stressed the importance of building “minimum consensus” amongst all the different Arab and oriental currents and denominations of Christianity in this critical situation in particular where this component faces an existential threat in a number of countries for various reasons and factors. In this context, participants stressed that the unity of the Christians’ voice in the region does not necessarily oppose other components” in the region, but rather it is an attempt to promote, preserve, and stop any attempts of killing the plurality and diversity which have always been what characterize and enrich the region.

Tenth: Participants listened with great attention to dozens of interventions that diagnosed some of the negative phenomena effecting Christian communities. One of it is what was described by participants with “a gap” between the church and its followers, young generations in particular. They demanded Christian clergymen to come closer to the problems and concerns faced by the followers of the church and encourage them to get effectively involved in the general national work in its various shapes and fields.

Eleventh: Participants also listened with great attention to these voices that warn of the growth of some extremist and isolationist trends within the Christian communities themselves. They encouraged the political and spiritual leaders of these communities to pay greater efforts to avoid falling into the circle of “the action and the reaction,” meaning responding to extremism with

extremism out of deep faith in fighting the challenges faced by Christians in the region within an inclusive and democratic national framework, as “no Christian solution for the Christian problem.”

Twelfth: Participants valued efforts paid by different bodies in the international community to provide humane relief and aid to hundreds of thousands of Christian displaced people and refugees, especially from Syria and Iraq and they noticed a tendency to facilitate the immigration of these to near or far shelters. They unanimously agreed on the necessity of giving the top priority of bringing back Christians to their country of origin and to provide them with the necessary security and protection against challenges they face and to work with governments in the region and all relevant bodies in order to preserve and enhance Christian presence in the region.

Roadmap to better future

Looking at the future relying on this mutual understanding of the challenges faced by Christians in the region, participants agreed upon a work plan and “roadmap” for the next phase. This roadmap tackled the following themes:

On the Regional and International Level

- It was decided that a letter will be sent to the secretary general of the Arab league to include the issue of Christians in Arab countries, especially Christians of Syria and Iraq within the agenda of the next Arab summit that shall be held in Cairo next March. Also to make the necessary decisions and take the right actions to end the Christian struggle and to provide Christians with the necessary protection and to preserve their rights and freedoms in the region, their countries, and societies, in addition to oblige member countries to take the necessary steps to achieve this purpose. It was decided that participants (each within his/her limitations and fields) shall communicate with the offices of the Arab league and the high ranking officials in the member countries for the same purpose.
- It was decided to send a letter to the secretary general of the Organization of the Islamic Conference to encourage him to pay this issue the required attention and to include it in the agenda of the organization. What is faced by Christians in member countries of the region urge it to take the required action, especially since so many violations of Christian rights are done by the name of Islam, while Islam is innocent of such evil actions and their perpetrators.
- Participants decided to send letters and communicate with the representatives of the different relevant regional and international bodies, including the International Red Cross, UNESCO, and UNICEF. These communications are meant to share the content of their mutual message which is included in this declaration and to pay particular attention to communicating with western capital cities encouraging them to increase their humanitarian aid in order to stop immigration which is draining Christian communities and in order to pay every possible effort to strengthen the settlement of Christians in the Arab countries. They are also an attempt to respect the rules of the international humanitarian law and the

standards of human rights, especially of refugees and those forcefully displaced away from their countries or homes.

- Participants decided to address all the regional and international human rights organizations and share the context, spirit, and content of this mutual vision. Also, addressing these organizations aims to encourage them to mobilize their powers to expose and unravel all the practices that violate human rights and are exercised over Christians in some of the region's countries. These organizations must also contribute to encouraging the international public opinion to support the just demands of these Christians, away from any 'double-faced' standards or any political biases which would weaken the confidence in the role and message of such organizations.
- To encourage international organizations, UNESCO in particular, to work on protecting the Christian heritage in our countries, being part of the international human heritage. They must work on stopping organized operations of targeting and destructing dozens and hundreds of churches, their contents and manuscripts, that are hundreds years old which are considered a heritage treasure to humanity as a whole.

Arab Governments and Parliaments

Participants agreed upon the need to urge the governments and parliaments of the concerned countries to apply responsibilities dictated by their constitutional mandates of protecting the Christian existence, promoting the Christian citizenry, eliminating all sorts of religious discrimination among citizens, fighting extremist trends of exclusion, and promoting the culture of tolerance, co-existence, respecting others, and religious, political, intellectual, and social pluralism. In this context, participants agreed upon the following recommendations:

- To urge the region's governments to adopt a comprehensive strategy to fight hyperbole, extremism, and terrorism in all its shapes and sources. This strategy that does not only recognize the importance of the security apparatus, but also recognizes the political, socio-economic, cultural, intellectual, educational, and religious reasons that caused the inception and spread of such phenomena. This strategy should not be restricted only to governments and their ministries, but rather it should also recognize the role of the different components of society and the state of political parties, civil society organizations, preaching and guidance institutions, academics, authors, women organizations, youth movements, etc.
- To invite our governments and parliaments to "constitutionalize" and "legalize" the concept of "effective equal citizenry" for all citizens, including Christians, without any sort of discrimination on the bases of gender, religion, language, race, or color; in a way that denies any manifestations of neglect, denial, and marginalization.
- To issue a special legislation "against discrimination" in all its forms, and to encourage working on establishing independent agencies or commissions that work on fighting any sort of discrimination against citizens.

- To invite Arab governments and parliaments to adopt special “political and legal arrangements” that preserve pluralism, guarantee active participation, and prevent elimination of the different components’ political representation. This is in order not to repeat the tragic mistakes that were committed in some Arab experiences and resulted in extreme injustices that inflicted major historical components of our societies for the sole reason of being “different” in religion, language, or nationality.
- To invite our governments to reconsider the educational curricula taught at all the educational stages and revise them of any remains of backward concepts that violate co-existence, tolerance, and brotherhood. To encourage these governments to enrich the educational curricula with the values of freedom, justice, tolerance, pluralism and diversity, effective equal citizenry, and modern civil upbringing.
- To invite our governments to increase their supervision over the preaching and guidance sector in order to prevent the leakage of any extremist or takfirist ideas into this very important and highly influential sector. Our governments should work on deepening the civil and democratic themes in the preaching and guidance discourse, as well as training imams and preachers and encouraging them to fear nothing when it comes to fighting abnormal thoughts that are alien to the spirit of Islam and its sublime teachings, in addition to encouraging them to spread the culture of brotherhood, tolerance, and co-existence and to promote values of freedom and pluralism through kind words and good advice.
- To launch national dialogue workshops to disseminate these concepts, particularly ensuring the national and regional involvement of the women and youth. These workshops aim to create broad national consensuses upon these concepts and principles and to pay particular attention to not keep these dialogues within the elite communities, but rather to target popular environments that, for one reason or another, turned into fertile grounds for the culture of hatred, extremism, and hyperbole.
- To encourage governments to straighten the public and private media discourse of any crookedness in order to fight the culture of hatred, incitement for violence, and despising other faiths; to turn these media into platforms of knowledge and enlightenment; and to stand against satellite channels and websites that work on spreading dark thoughts of takfirism and promote violence and consequently threaten the unity of our societies and our national identity.
- To encourage the region’s governments to politically and journalistically work on keeping the issue of Arab and Eastern Christians on the agenda of our societies, public opinion, and countries.

Islamic Scholars, Authorities and Movements

Because war against the dark forces of extremism and hyperbole is a war on the minds and hearts of citizens, and because takfirism should be fought only with the works of takfirism, participants demand all Muslim scholars, Al-Azhar Mosque’s authority, all Muslim thinkers, and Islamist movements to work on the following:

- To firmly stand, with Fiqh and intellect, against the dark takfirist ideology which does not only make non-Muslims enemies of Islam, but also creates enmity between Muslims themselves and between people of the same denomination, and divides them into disputing parties inciting against each other and killing one another.
- To invoke and disseminate the bright pages in the Arab Islamic history and to promote broad awareness of this history in order to fight the culture of ignorance and obscurantism adopted by dark extremist forces. Also, to invoke the prominent roles played by Christians in the history and present of this region, in a way that helps building a mutual future that is responsive to the aspirations and hopes of our peoples.
- To endorse the values of co-existence and the rights of Christians and non-Muslims within the Islamic discourse, and to enroot the rights of Christians from an enlightened, civic, democratic, contemporary, and modern Islamic viewpoint, without submitting to the extortion of high extremist voices that offend Islam more than offending non-Muslims.
- Participants valued the roles played by Islamic scholars, Islamic institutions, and moderate movements of political Islam to defend the image and message of Islam. Participants called for maximizing the scientific, intellectual, and fiqh efforts that aim to isolate extremist currents that use Islam as a cover and to show their dangerousness on the Muslims, Christians, and all components of the region.
- Participants noticed the evolution in the discourse of some of the moderate movements of political Islam towards Christians. They called to dispel the “gray areas” in these movements’ political and intellectual discourse, particularly towards Christians and the different faces of human rights in general. Speaking about Muslim-Christian brotherhood is no longer sufficient and the ambiguous language of generalities is no longer valid to face the flood of extremism and hyperbole. Today, what’s really required more than ever before is speaking about effective and equal “Christian citizenry” and to call things by their names as it is not at all acceptable to keep hiding behind general slogans which would soon fall at the first practical test.
- We invite Al-Azhar, Holy Najaf, and other moderate Islamic platforms regardless of their denomination to launch intellectual and fiqh workshops, lead comprehensive national dialogues to stand against violence, extremism, and terrorism which uses Islam as a cover, spread the sublime, heavenly message, and develop a civil-democratic Islamic discourse that substitutes the dark discourse.
- Participants stressed the extreme cruciality of presuming the movement of religious reform which was incepted over a hundred years ago by Islamic scholars and thinkers, opening the gates of Ijtihad and modernization in order to cope up with the age’s problems and challenges, and encouraging intellectual and Fiqh productivity in this regard to not leave these spaces open for takfirist and extremist imams to exclude for themselves.

Intellectuals and Civil Society Organizations

- Participants encouraged intellectuals, thinkers, human rights activists, and academics from different political currents to play their important historical roles. These roles that involve promoting and deepening the values of pluralism, diversity, and human rights, presuming the Arab renaissance project that is based on the principle of a just civic/democratic state, and differentiating between religion and the state as that “religion for God and the state for all.”
- Participants stressed the extreme importance of the role of civil society and its women, labor, and syndical organizations in fighting hyperbole, extremism, and terrorism on one hand, and fighting corruption and tyranny on the other hand.
- Participants paid careful attention to fighting all attempts of abuse or discrimination against women in these societies and countries regardless of their religion or nationality, especially the attempts of taking women back to the dark ages of backwardness, ignorance, and slavery under religious excuses which do not stand a chance before rationale, logic, or the noble intentions of the divine laws.

Christian Communities

As participants acknowledged all what was demonstrated in the national and regional conferences to the representatives of their Christian communities in the six countries of readings in “the present and future of Christians” and the challenges faced by these communities, they agreed to work on the following:

- To pay every effort to stop forceful displacement faced by Christian communities in some of the Arab countries and what accompanies them of murder, destruction, burning possessions and churches, security and economic harassments, deprivation of rights and freedoms, and steps that target Christians’ dignity and humanity, in cooperation with all effective forces in our countries and societies. To try to provide secure temporary shelters for Christian refugees and displaced people in their countries or in other neighboring countries until they are enabled to go back to their original cities and villages from which they were unjustly expelled.
- To pay every effort to stop immigration and draining processes which Christian communities suffer from which usually take place for economic or social reasons, sometimes for injustice or discrimination in the legislations and laws in force, or for the lack of freedom to exercise religious rights or rituals. All this should be done in cooperation with all relevant bodies in society and the state.
- To encourage active involvement in the political, human rights, civil, and peaceful struggle for the constitutionalization and legalization of Christian rights and the elimination of any form of discrimination against them in legislation and practice and work with public offices and different positions, managing the religious affairs of the church, and reviving the concept of “equal citizenry.” All that within a national democratic framework that is based on the deeply enrooted belief that Christians are a major part in the components of their

countries and there is no Christian solution for Christian problems and that the civil democratic contemporary and modern state is a state that does not discriminate against any of its citizens which is a solution for the problems resulting from the disruption between the state and its citizens.

- Without prejudicing the pluralism of Christian communities intellectually, politically, socially, and denominationally, participants pledged to work on the principle of “building minimum internal consensus” which guarantees Christians the ability to confront the challenges and problems they face in this critical transitional phase in the history of the entire region.
- To work on bridging the gaps amongst Christian communities whether between the church and its followers or between different churches. Also, to pay particular attention to young generations and women and to stand intellectually, spiritually, and politically against extremism and hyperbole that started leaking into these communities. To uphold the culture of coexistence, tolerance, brotherhood in the state and citizenry, respect the others and pluralism, and spreading the high spiritual values of Christianity.
- In this context, and based on the prominent role played by the renaissance Christians in bridging the gap between the west and east and encouraging interreligious dialogue among civilizations, participants encouraged Christian parties to resume the enlightening role that was incepted by their ascendants more than a hundred years ago, and to fight the manifestations of frustration and disappointment which began to leak into the discourse of political and spiritual Christian leaders.
- To work on building frameworks and structures for coordination, cooperation, consultation, and joint work on the national and regional levels in order to execute what’s being agreed on of orientations and recommendations, and to organize dialogue and disagreement over disputed issues in order to guarantee a bigger effectiveness for the Christian voice within the framework of a national democracy project.

Follow-up Committee

- Participants decided to give the name the “Amman Declaration: Roadmap for a Better Future for Christians in Arab Countries” to this final declaration. They also decided to form an “Amman Declaration follow-up commission” to execute the recommendations and tasks of this final declaration. This commission will be formed of three or four representatives for each Christian group from the six countries and to set a work plan for itself for the next phase. Participants asked Al-Quds Center for Political Studies to form this commission, consulting different relevant bodies and in a way that ensures the representation of different denominations and different currents that have the most effective representation in the six countries.
- The commission shall meet as soon as possible to set a work plan for itself, mark out the immediate urgent security, relief, political, and human rights needs of Iraqi and Syrian

Christians, and set the required programs and plans to execute the roadmap included within the Amman Declaration for a better future for Christians in Arab countries.