

## Expert Discussion

# Christians and Christianity in the Middle East

**Amman and Madaba, Jordan**

**Thursday, 26 May – Friday, 27 May 2022**

### Concept

KAS Jordan Office, in cooperation with the Amman-based Catholic Centre for Studies and Media (CCSM), organizes a two-day expert discussion on the current status and future of Christians and Christianity in the Middle East. Participants, including clerics from different Christian denominations and academics from Jordan, Palestine, Lebanon, Syria, Egypt, Germany and the US, will be invited to share their thoughts on the following topics: (1) the current status and future of the Christians of the Middle East; (2) the role of Arab Muslims and how they help Christians remain in their countries; (3) the situation of Christians in Palestine and Israel, with a focus on Jerusalem; (4) the Christians of Egypt, Iraq and Syria; and, (5) the impact of international politics, particularly of the US and Europe, on Christians in the Middle East.

For decades, Christians across the Middle East have been grappling with armed conflict, poverty and various forms of oppression. A 2019 British government study of Christians of the Middle East and North Africa found that their numbers had fallen to less than 4 percent of the population compared to over 20 percent a century ago. During the past decade, numerous incidents have taken place against Christians in Iraq and Syria, leaving them extremely vulnerable to the new political conditions. In Egypt, which is home to the largest Christian minority in the Middle East, Christians suffer mostly at the hands of their local communities, the government often offering its symbolic support in spite of laws limiting their freedoms. In Lebanon, Christians are emigrating in large numbers due to an unprecedented economic crisis, compounded by the absence of rule of law. And, as the dire situation continues in Palestine as a result of the protracted Middle East conflict, there is an urgent need to assess the current status of the Christians of the East and attempt to pave the way for a better future.

The KAS Jordan Office and the Catholic Centre for Studies and Media held two similar meetings in Cadenabbia, Italy in 2015 and Berlin in 2016, both resulting in constructive dialogue and recommendations. A few years on, and with dynamics in the Middle East still problematic, it is vital to study the situation and the emigration trends of Arab Christians, to reveal the reasons for those trends, and attempt to find solutions in order to preserve their important presence in their native lands.

This project is very much in line with Jordan's interest in promoting interfaith dialogue. For several decades, it has actively organized and participated in various important meetings with the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue (PCID) and other entities concerned with Muslim-Christian relations and peaceful coexistence. In 2004, Jordan released the Amman Message, aiming to clarify to the modern world the nature of true Islam. HM King Abdullah II proposed World Interfaith Harmony Week at the UN General Assembly in September 2010 to promote a culture of peace and nonviolence. The resolution was adopted in October of the same year.

Wednesday, 25 May 2022

Afternoon

Arrival of international participants and check-in at the Fairmont Amman Hotel

Thursday, 26 May 2022

09.30 – 10.00h

Registration: Fairmont Ballroom, Fairmont Amman Hotel

10.00 – 10.30h

**Welcome and Introduction**

**Welcome Remarks**

**Fr. Dr. Rif'at Bader**

Director, Catholic Centre for Studies and Media, Jordan

**H.B. Patriarch Pierbattista Pizzaballa OFM**

Latin Patriarch of Jerusalem

**H.E. Bernhard Kampmann**

Ambassador of the Federal Republic of Germany to Jordan

**Keynote Speech**

**H.E. Hermann Gröhe**

Vice President of the Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung and Member of the German Parliament

**Chair**

**Dr. Edmund Ratka**

Resident Representative, KAS Jordan Office

10.30 – 12.00h

**Session 1: The Current Status and Future of the Christians of the Middle East**

Location: Fairmont Ballroom, Fairmont Amman

**Moderator:**

**Rana Sweis**

Founder and Managing Director, Wishbox Media; Freelance Journalist, Jordan

**Panelists:**

**Bishop Jamal Khader**

Latin Patriarchal Vicar for Jordan; Auxiliary Bishop of the Latin Patriarchate of Jerusalem

**Dr. Tarek Mitri**

President, Saint George University of Beirut; Distinguished Fellow at the Issam Fares Institute on Public Policy and International Affairs at the American University of Beirut (AUB), Lebanon

**Dr. Elizabeth Monier**

Affiliated Researcher, Faculty of Asian and Middle Eastern Studies, University of Cambridge, UK

12.00 – 12.30h

Coffee Break

12.15 – 13.45h

**Session 2: The Role of Arab Muslims: How Do They Help the Christians Remain in their Countries?**

Location: Fairmont Ballroom, Fairmont Amman

**Moderator:**

**Fr. Dr. Rif'at Bader**

Director, Catholic Centre for Studies and Media, Amman, Jordan

**Panelists:**

**Dr. Mohammad Sammak**

Member of the Board of Presidents, the World Conference on Religion and Peace (WCRP), New York; Secretary-General of Lebanon's National Committee for Christian-Muslim Dialogue, Lebanon

**Dr. Amer al-Hafi**

Faculty of Sharia, Al al-Bayt University; Academic Advisor, the Royal Institute for Inter-Faith Studies (RIIFS), Jordan

13.45 – 15.00h

Lunch at Nur Restaurant, Fairmont Amman

15.00 – 16:45h

**Session 3: The Situation of Christians in Palestine and Israel: Focus on Jerusalem**

Location: Diamond Meeting Room, Fairmont Amman

**Moderator:**

**Farah Bdour**

Programs Director, Amman Center for Peace and Development (ACPD)

**Panelists:**

**Archbishop Christophoros Atallah**

Greek Orthodox Archbishop for Jordan

**Dr. Wasfi al-Kailani**

Jerusalem Affairs Manager, The Royal Court; Executive Director of the Hashemite Fund for the Reconstruction of the Al-Aqsa Mosque and the Dome of the Rock

**Dr. Bernard Sabella**

Executive Secretary, the Department of Service to Palestinian Refugees, the Middle East Council of Churches; Elected Member of the Palestinian Legislative Council (PLC), Palestine

**Msgr. Dr. Agapios Abu Saada**

Regional Administrator of the Basilian Order in the Holy Land; Parish Priest of the Melkite Catholic Community, Haifa

20.00h

Dinner at Fakhreldin Restaurant