

Patriarchs of Eastern Churches appeal for aid against forces of religious extremism

18 August 2014

High officials from ancient Christian churches in the Near East have issued a common statement denouncing the emergence of armed extremist groups who “murder, shatter and violate the sacred nature of the churches” and other suffering communities in the Middle East. The church leaders call upon the international community, by action of the United Nations Security Council and the International Court of Justice, to restore the rights and homes of civilian populations and guarantee a return to land that has been taken from them.

The statement describes religious extremism as “a disease” that attacks the foundations of inter-religious coexistence throughout the region, and the signers of the statement call on governments now supplying terrorists groups to cut off all funding and material support.

“Sister churches” throughout the world are requested to “show solidarity” with the Middle Eastern Christians’ pleas and prayers in the face of wide-scale persecution, and to encourage a continuation of efficient relief work. The church leaders provide their brief analysis of the situation in the areas of Mosul and the Nineveh Valley in Iraq, parts of Syria and Lebanon, as well as in Gaza.

Church officials gathered on 7 April in Lebanon at the invitation of the Maronite Patriarch of Antioch, Cardinal Bishara Butros al Rai. Among those attending the convocation were: Armenian Apostolic Orthodox Catholicos Aram I of Cilicia, a former moderator of the World Council of Churches (WCC); Greek Catholic Patriarch Gregorius Lahham III of Antioch and All the East, Alexandria and Jerusalem; Greek Orthodox Patriarch Yuhanna Al Yazajee X of Antioch and All the East (a WCC member church); Armenian Catholic Catholicos and Patriarch Narcis Bedros XIX of Cilicia; Syriac Catholic Patriarch Mar Aghnatis Yousel Younan III of Antioch; Assyrian Orthodox Patriarch Aghnatis Afram II of Antioch (a WCC member church); a representative of Chaldean Patriarch Louis Raphael Sakko I of Babylon, and Bishop Shlimon Wardouni, the Chaldean Patriarchal Vicar.

[English translation of the patriarchs’ statement](#)

WCC member churches in the Middle East

The World Council of Churches promotes Christian unity in faith, witness and service for a just and peaceful world. An ecumenical fellowship of churches founded in 1948, by the end of 2013 the WCC had 345 member churches representing more than 500 million Christians from Protestant, Orthodox, Anglican and other traditions in over 140 countries. The WCC works cooperatively with the Roman Catholic Church. The WCC general secretary is the Rev. Dr Olav Fykse Tveit, from the [Lutheran] Church of Norway.

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