

## **General secretary affirms churches’ commitment to justice and peace in the Middle East**

**19 October 2015**

**“As a fellowship of churches worldwide, we are deeply committed to support initiatives for just peace for the whole Middle East region,” said Rev. Dr Olav Fykse Tveit, general secretary of the World Council of Churches (WCC).**

Tveit acknowledge with appreciation what people, government, the Church of Greece and faith communities are doing in the country to show generous hospitality and solidarity towards the hundreds of thousands refugees. “They are escaping terrible wars in neighbouring countries and trying to find refuge and a safe haven in Europe.”

Tveit shared his views at the international conference on “Religious and Cultural Pluralism and Peaceful Coexistence in the Middle East” held on 19 October in Athens, Greece.

“In a region troubled by so much turbulence, our faith and hope mean that we are capable of seeing the crucified and risen Christ being with us in the midst of all tribulations,” said Tveit. “Despite being few in number, Christians in the region are, as Jesus said in the gospel, the ‘little yeast that works through the whole batch of dough’. This is a symbol of the positive coexistence we all need and believe in.”

Tveit explained that the WCC has long-time experience in dealing with issues related to the Middle East. He said that the WCC has cultivated relations and co-operation with many Muslim and Jewish leaders and institutions, initiating and facilitating dialogue and joint initiatives on critical issues important in nurturing conviviality among different faith communities.

Tveit added that the WCC is particularly concerned about the presence and witness of the Christians in the Middle East. “Today, their very existence is threatened, and with it the whole rich diversity of the region,” he stated. “It is time for working and walking together in Christian unity.”

The international conference, which was held through an initiative of the Greek foreign minister, Nikos Kotzias, focused on critical issues related to the Middle East, exploring the best ways to

protect the rights and fundamental freedoms of religious and cultural communities in the region, with a view toward promoting peaceful co-existence in conditions of dignity and mutual understanding.

**[Read full text of the WCC general secretary's speech](#)**

**WCC programme "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, today the WCC brings together 345 Protestant, Orthodox, Anglican and other churches representing more than 550 million Christians in over 120 countries, and 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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