



Beirut, Lebanon, 3-4 April 2018

International Conference

“Unity in diversity and basic freedom principles for Christians and Muslims in the Middle East: Parliamentary dialogue conference”

DECLARATION

We, parliamentarians – representatives of peoples from Parliaments of the Christian Orthodox and the Muslim World, convening today here in Beirut, upon initiative of the Parliament of Lebanon and the Interparliamentary Assembly on Orthodoxy, on a historical and particularly critical moment for the Middle East.

With zones of civil war and destructions in Syria and the attempt by third countries to violently dismember the country.

With inopportune political decisions by the USA political leadership recognizing Jerusalem as the capital of Israel and the ongoing occupation of Palestinian territories by Israel.

With the still open issue of the abduction of Metropolitan Paul of the Orthodox Church of Antioch and the Syrian Orthodox Metropolitan Gregorios Yohanna Ibrahim of Aleppo, who have been missing for five consecutive years.

We first express our concern and raise a voice of protest over everything that is happening in the area of the Middle East, condemning most emphatically such behaviors.

Recalling the long-term historical, political, but also religious bonds that unite us,

Recognizing the need for a constructive political but also interreligious dialogue in our era,

Wishing to contribute in the consolidation of the concept of international peace and security and promoting policies for peace today and in the future.

Making efforts to eliminate phenomena of religious fundamentalism and violent extremism that plague regions of the world,



We declare that:

Parliamentarism, as a representative institution of citizens and a place of formulation and expression of their demands, is a critical factor of intermediation between peoples and their leaderships, both political and religious. Therefore, with respect for interreligious and interethnic dialogue, tolerance for diversity, and safeguarding of fundamental human rights, parliaments are required to construct an enduring relation of trust with civil societies.

Relations of democratic countries' parliaments with the representatives of culture and religious leaderships must be based on transparency and accountability. At the same time, we express our deep concern over the current inexistence of such inter-faith dialogue in the Middle East, we express our hope that such dialogue restarts and we make efforts for establishment of dialogue Fora between parliamentary institutions and religious communities on local and international level.

Elimination of all sorts of discrimination is pursued through parliamentarism, and parliaments will be taking the necessary legislative measures to this effect, in view of combating racism, intolerance and hate speech. Implementation of education and social programs for youth, focusing on the critical knowledge of religious traditions and democratic principles of social cohesion, can have a decisive role to this effect.

Our Parliaments will pursue to strengthen the legal and regulatory framework aiming to:

(a) ensure the necessary compatibility of national legislation with the most important universal texts on protection of human rights (b) promote the identity of national, cultural, language, religious or ethnic groups and their right to live in community with others (c) interreligious and interethnic dialogue on the national and global level.

Our Parliaments will promote measures leading to the creation of more representative and more effective parliamentary bodies. Measures to enhance this perspective are, among others:

- (a) Establishment of minimum representation quota for minority populations of religious or other nature, in committees with parliamentary and law-making tasks, where feasible
- (b) Assessment of the impact of legislation and financial aid to ethnic and religious minorities suggested by the Governments



- (c) Measures such as joint parliamentary working groups, the introduction of a legal framework for synergies, exchange of information and good practices among political bodies to combat violent extremism
- (d) Reinforcement of traditional religions, acknowledging their role in the historical journey of each country. A special institutional status may be attributed thereto, affirming their institutional character.

For protection of human rights, especially religious rights, the Parliaments will take initiatives such as:

- (a) allocation of resources for awareness-raising activities on matters related to culture and religion
- (b) access of minorities to all parliamentary bodies, to express their needs and safeguard their rights
- (c) welfare policy making for minority groups.

In order to protect freedom of preserving the existing religious beliefs, Parliaments will care for protection of their citizens' identity, ensuring the right to religious education in schools, religious access to state establishments, as well as their presence in the state-owned and private Mass Media.

Parliaments will pursue strengthening of dialogue among religions, by actions such as:

- (a) financial or other support from international sources to international parliamentary organizations and prestigious international fora supporting the interreligious and interethnic dialogue,
- (b) activation of parliamentary diplomacy to resolve interreligious conflicts,
- (c) support of interreligious initiatives aiming to better understanding of the others,
- (d) organization of conferences, seminars, two-day meetings, congresses and sessions having as central theme the interreligious and interethnic dialogue,
- (e) establishment of a permanent joint parliamentary body responsible for information and coordination of actions,
- (f) deployment of observer or peacemaker teams to societies exiting violent conflicts with a strongly religious character.