



Statement on the Middle East

We the Executive Committee of the World Communion of Reformed Churches have gathered here at the Dhour Choueir Evangelical Conference Center in Lebanon under the theme: *God of Life, Lead us on your Path of Justice, Peace and Reconciliation.*

Inspired by the words of the prophet Isaiah, we strive to be “called the repairer of the breach, the restorer of streets to dwell in” (Isaiah 58:12) and can thus find no place more appropriate to be than here, in the Middle East.

As we have heard from our sisters and brothers who dwell in these streets, the cradle of Christianity is in crisis, and many of their streets are shattered, both figuratively and literally:

- A brother from Iraq told us that he must keep the records of his church packed in his car, not knowing when he may have to flee from radical Islamic forces.
- A sister from Lebanon told of Palestinians living as refugees for nearly seven decades and commented on the irony as she watched walls erected in Israel/Palestine even as they were coming down in Berlin.
- Despite churches being burned, a brother from Egypt related a heartening story of Christians and Muslims standing side by side seeking change—a symbol of hope even in the midst of ongoing struggle.
- A youth worker in the region raised concerns for young people, for their current safety and of whether there is even any future here for them.
- The work of a brother from Syria has moved from writing sermons to supplying water to his flock and many others.

Yet these stories of struggle only hint at the complex picture of this region. Christians here are the first disciples of the church of Antioch and have endured much during their two thousand years of faithfulness.

Historically Christians and Muslims have often lived peacefully as neighbours, enjoying a dialogue of life and sharing common values for the good of their community. We lament the deterioration of relationships that has sprung from radical religious movements and express deep regret concerning the way religion is used for political agendas.

Even today and despite their increasingly smaller numbers Christians in the Middle East remain the salt and light in their communities. We have seen evidence that their roles and impact in their communities goes far beyond their numbers. For instance, the peacemakers in the region are often the graduates of Christian schools, regardless of their present religious practice.

We are heartened by Middle East Christians’ demonstration of grace, courage and resolve to stay in their communities. The region would be seriously impoverished without their presence as a vital means to a peaceful, just and reconciled Middle East.

We have heard these stories from our sisters and brothers and realize that the Middle East is complex, and each country has its own specific context. The situation in one country may be dramatically different than in another.

Our coming here has given us a renewed opportunity to express our solidarity with our members in this region. We do not want to see this as a single act but the beginning of a renewed commitment. How then can we as a World Communion of Reformed Churches respond to our sisters and brothers in the Middle East?

We call for global recognition of the suffering of all people in the Middle East.

We call for violence to cease in Syria immediately and pray for peace to spread like ripples from there throughout the entire region.

We urge our officers and secretariat to strengthen the bonds among our member churches in this region to consolidate their communion.

We commit ourselves to tell the stories of our Middle East sisters and brothers to the wider world.

We encourage our member churches:

- To join us in a fresh sense of solidarity with Christians in the Middle East and a lasting commitment to the wellbeing of all people of this region.
- To hear anew the stories of our sisters and brothers, as opposed to simply accepting the rhetoric of the media.
- To welcome the refugees as neighbours rather than treat them as “others.”
- To not ignore or allow our governments to ignore the places of massive suffering or their contribution to it.
- To speak up for the wellbeing of Christians and all people in this region, decrying the violence that creates such destruction and dehumanizes people.
- To draw inspiration from our sisters and brothers in the Middle East who show the love of Christ in the face of incredible challenges and frequent calls to suffer.
- To live and to pray in the spirit of Isaiah 58:6-12, which says:

Is not this the fast that I choose: to loose the bonds of injustice, to undo the thongs of the yoke, to let the oppressed go free, and to break every yoke?

Is it not to share your bread with the hungry, and bring the homeless poor into your house; when you see the naked, to cover them, and not to hide yourself from your own kin?

Then your light shall break forth like the dawn, and your healing shall spring up quickly; your vindicator shall go before you, the glory of the Lord shall be your rearguard. Then you shall call, and the Lord will answer; you shall cry for help, and he will say, Here I am.

If you remove the yoke from among you, the pointing of the finger, the speaking of evil, if you offer your food to the hungry and satisfy the needs of the afflicted, then your light shall rise in the darkness and your gloom be like the noonday. The Lord will guide you continually, and satisfy your needs in parched places, and make your bones strong; and you shall be like a watered garden, like a spring of water, whose waters never fail.

Your ancient ruins shall be rebuilt; you shall raise up the foundations of many generations; you shall be called the repairer of the breach, the restorer of streets to live in.

Adopted by the Executive Committee on 15 May 2015.