



رَابطة الكنائس الإنجيلية في الشرق الأوسط
THE FELLOWSHIP OF THE MIDDLE EAST EVANGELICAL CHURCHES

***The Final Communiqué of the Second Conference
Of the Fellowship of Middle East Evangelical Churches
Evangelicals and Christian Presence in The East***

Cairo: 10-12 September 2014

The Fellowship of Middle East Evangelical Churches (FMEEC) held its second International Conference on the topic: ***Evangelicals and Christian Presence in The East*** from 10-12 September 2014 at the Concord El Salam Heliopolis Hotel in Cairo – Egypt.

This Conference comes as a follow up to FMEEC’s previous conference on the same topic that was held in Beirut, Lebanon in 2012. It also comes at a very critical moment in our history because of the tragically deteriorating situation of Christians in the Middle East region, but especially in ***Iraq*** and ***Syria***; where widespread proliferation of “takfiri” terrorism and violence, unprecedented in Middle East history, has wrought waves of killing, destruction and displacement. All this, is in addition to the tension and violence currently prevailing in Palestine and Lebanon.

The Conference had two parts: The first consisted of official visits made by some of the participants to the Prime Minister of Egypt, Engineer Ibrahim Mahlab, to the minister of Religious Trusts (Awqaf), Dr. Muhammad Mukhtar Gom’aa, as well as to “Sheikh Al Azhar,” the Grand Imam Dr. Ahmad El Tayyib.

The composition of the delegation included the President of FMEEC, Rev. Dr. Andrea Zaki of Egypt, the Vice President, Rev. Dr. Habib Badr of Lebanon, the General Secretary, Mrs. Rosangela Jarjour of Lebanon, accompanied by members of FMEEC’s Executive Committee that included the President of the Lutheran Church in Jordan and the Holy Land (and current President of the Lutheran World Federation), Bishop Dr. Munib Younan from Jerusalem, Rev. Adib Awad of the National Evangelical Synod of Syria and Lebanon (NESSL) and Rev. Dr. Helmi Kades of the Evangelical Synod of the Nile in Egypt (ESNG). Other members of the delegation included the Rev. Dr. Safwat El Baiady, President of the Protestant Churches of Egypt, Rev. Dr. George Shaker, President of the Synod of ESNG, Rev. Rif’at Fathy, the General Secretary of the Synod of ESNG, Rev. Dr. Riad Jarjour of NESSL, Bishop Dr. Mouneer Hanna Anis, the Anglican Bishop of Egypt and North Africa and Rev. Farouk Hammo, pastor of the Evangelical Church in Baghdad, Iraq. During these visits, the topics of the Conference were discussed, and many current issues that occupy the Arab and Middle Eastern region were raised.

The leadership of FMEEC expressed thanks to the people and government of Egypt, and especially appreciated the meetings they had with the Prime Minister and the Minister of Religious Trusts (Awqaf). They also praised the religious leadership,

especially “Imam Al Azhar,” for the constructive spirit of dialogue and enlightened vision that he possesses, and that was clearly exhibited during the audience with him. The delegation also highlighted the spirit of hospitality that they felt while in Cairo, particularly noting the feeling of security that currently prevails in the Arab Republic of Egypt. Accordingly, they also thanked the government for all the facilities it offered, as well as the good media coverage of the Conference by the official and local Egyptian press and TV.

The second part of the Conference consisted of the meetings themselves; meetings that witnessed, and for the first time, the presence of a cluster of Muslim scholars and personages who actually enjoyed the lion’s share of the deliberations. The Conference was also attended by the main leadership of FMEEC’s member Churches, as well as delegates from sister Eastern Churches and a good number of representatives from Western and International Evangelical Churches and church organizations.

During the Conference, a celebration of the 40th anniversary of the foundation of FMEEC (1974) was held at the headquarters of the *Coptic Evangelical Organization for Social Services* (CEOSS) in Cairo. The main speaker at the event was Mr. Samir Morcos.

The main deliberations of the Conference dealt with the position of Islam and Muslims vis a vis the Christian constituencies with which they live in the Middle East. Several questions were raised and discussed: What does it mean for Muslims to coexist in one “nation-state” with non-Islamic constituencies (minorities); and to interact on equal basis with them politically, economically, socially, culturally, etc.? Do Muslims have a vested interest in the subsistence of Christians in the Middle East? What specifically is that interest?

The main Muslim speakers at the Conference were: Esq. Dr. Rida Al Ajhouri from Tunisia, Mr. Ahmad Ban from Egypt, Sheikh Dr. Muhammad El Din Afifi of the venerable Al Azhar in Egypt, his Excellency Minister Ibrahim Shams El Din from Lebanon and Dr. Al Sadiq Abdullah Al Faqih from Sudan. There was a consensus amongst the speakers that a distinction ought to be made between Islam as a religion, and the views and behavior of Muslims here and there. They all affirmed that Islam as such has nothing to do with the actions of terrorist organizations that have espoused violence in the name of religion. The past and present history of Islam clearly demonstrates that Muslims have acted to “preserve” Christians, and that Islam rejects the radical stance that is today adopted by some Islamic movements who preach violence and embrace an exclusivist ideology, and who, therefore, do not properly reflect the true and authentic Islamic religion. They also asserted that the “civil state,” with its appropriate apparatus, is the primary and permanent authority responsible for the protection of citizens. They also emphasized the need of safeguarding an all-inclusive notion of citizenship based on equal participation of all. In such a unified state, Eastern Christians are seen as authentic owners of the land, and not as outside intruders. They are indigenous natives of their region’s different countries, and have spilled their blood in defense of their homelands. Accordingly, they called upon Middle Eastern Christians to remain ensconced in the region and not to emigrate. They urged them to actively participate in the development of the political order in their countries in order to arrive at tolerant and democratic

governments. In this way they can contribute their share towards the establishment, protection and preservation of freedoms in the Middle Eastern world

The conferees, however, agreed that mere condemnation of the current actions and positions of radical Muslims by reference to epochs of good practice in history, or by making speeches behind closed doors, is not enough. There must be an all-encompassing cooperation between able and concerned political and governmental parties in order to find proper ways and means to effectively put an end to these radical actions. Appropriate steps must be adopted in the spheres of education, culture and the media, etc. in order to strengthen and buttress the moderate interpretation of Islam. Special attention must be paid to the quality of pulpit sermons in mosques in order to combat fiery preaching, and put a halt to exclusivist rhetoric that rejects pluralism.

The Conference also dealt with the challenges facing Middle Eastern Evangelicals and their Western and international partners. The speakers affirmed that local Evangelicals, as individuals and communities, are now a permanent feature of Eastern Christianity, and have accordingly committed themselves to live a life of peaceful coexistence with their Muslim neighbors and with all the other constituencies inhabiting the East. This particular topic was addressed by several local Evangelical leaders and some speakers from sister eastern churches. Amongst them were Mrs. Rosangela Jarjour, Rev. Dr. Andrea Zaki, Rev. Dr. Habib Badr, Bishops Munib Younan and Mouneer Hanna Anis, Rev. Dr. Safwat El Baiady, Rev. Dr. Mitri Raheb, Preacher Najla Kassab, Father Michel Jalakh (General Secretary of the Middle East Council of Churches) and Mr. Ghassan Shami, a journalist and media expert.

A round table discussion on Christian emigration was also held. The participants were: Rev. Dr. Paul Haidostian (President of Haigazian University, Beirut), Mr. Habib Afram (President of the Syriac League), Rev. Harout Selimian (pastor of the Armenian Evangelical Church in Aleppo, Syria), Rev. Maan Bitar (pastor of the Evangelical Church in Mhardé, Syria), Rev. Farouk Hammo of Baghdad, Iraq, Rev. Dr. Bill Schwartz (pastor of the Anglican Church in the Gulf) and Dr. Sameh Fawzi of the Coptic Orthodox Church in Egypt.

The participants agreed that, since the very beginning of their presence in the ME, and notwithstanding the difficulties they have faced, or have caused, Eastern Evangelicals have sought to build bridges of understanding, concord, cooperation and respect -- first with their fellow Christians and Christian Churches and societies -- and secondly, with the Muslim neighbors amongst whom they live and with whom they share a common life. These Evangelicals, as individuals and societies, have been effective and influential in the region, and they understand themselves as heirs of a veritable and historically tested movement of reform and renaissance that has produced a great legacy of moral values, as well as a heritage of social, cultural, educational and academic services.

Individually and communally, Middle Eastern Evangelicals have also played a pivotal role in the rise and development of nationalist sentiments and movements amongst the peoples of the region. They have also participated in the launching of liberation as well as reform and renaissance movements in the region. This is not to mention the high number of schools, colleges, hospitals and other social service

organizations that Evangelicals established, and that have rendered services indiscriminately to all social classes. Furthermore, the speakers pointed to the need for a critical role that Evangelicals must play in revitalizing the regional ecumenical movement by supporting the work of the Middle East Council of Churches (MECC). It is imperative that the unified voice of Eastern Christians should be grounded in their common faith and baptism rather than in their joint fear of “the other.”

Finally, another round table discussion that included several representatives of Western churches and international partners was held. It was seen that we are all challenged to seek new ways of strengthening our relations and broadening areas of cooperation and bridge-building between the Churches of FMEEC and all influential and proactive evangelical communities and organizations in the West and across the world. Through these relations, we seek to work for peace and reconciliation, and to advocate for just and rightful national causes.

In conclusion, the Conference issued the following recommendations:

- 1- We affirm that Christian presence must be rooted and ensconced in the Middle East.
- 2- We affirm that a sustained common life between Christians, Muslims and all other constituencies living in the Middle East, must be governed by the Charter of Universal Human Rights and by International Law.
- 3- We appeal for the protection of all the constituencies living in the Middle East, irrespective of their religion and ethnicity.
- 4- We call for the documentation and archiving of Eastern spiritual heritages through all available media instruments.
- 5- We affirm that the rule of law and the statutes of citizenship in a democratic civil state, are the sole legitimate means of protection for all citizens and foreigners living in the Middle East.
- 6- We seek to revitalize the spirit of ecumenism and unity by supporting the MECC.
- 7- We commit ourselves to follow up the proceedings of the Conference and to implement its recommendations in FMEEC’s member churches locally; and shall create awareness programs pertaining to all the issues discussed at the Conference.

In solidarity with our sister Eastern Churches, and in coordination with the worldwide Evangelical community, we shall raise our voices in order to reach the ears of all international and world forums, so that the perspective of Eastern Christianity on the crucial issues facing the Middle East shall be heard loud and clear.

From the Office of the General Secretary
Cairo, 10 September 2014