

Vienna Declaration

United Against Violence in the Name of Religion

November 19, 2014

Under the auspices of the King Abdullah Bin Abdulaziz International Centre for Interreligious and Intercultural Dialogue, high-level representatives of the major world religious and social institutions have gathered to agree on programs and initiatives that contribute to strengthening the unity against violence in the name of religion to support religious and cultural diversity in Iraq and Syria.

Because the multi-religious nature, KAICIID and its diverse board is an example for commitment to preserving religious and cultural diversity, and unequivocally reject all forms of violent actions, especially the ones that are committed in the name of religion. The center strives to foster dialogue and to strengthen the foundations of citizenship. KAICIID desires to enhance the spirit of moderation, and to establish purposeful and sincere dialogue founded upon the principles of coexistence, mutual understanding and cooperation.

Although conflicts in the world over the past two decades in various regions have caused tremendous grief for us, we recognize that the ramifications of this current conflict have dangerously expanded and targeted the followers of every religion--Muslims, Christians and others. We unanimously denounce these destructive actions wherever they may occur. We especially condemn the harrowing and treacherous events that have recently occurred in the Middle East, particularly in Iraq and Syria.

We reject violence in all its forms especially the violence perpetuated in the name of religion because we believe escalating violence and destruction ultimately destroy the entire foundation for social cohesion. In the wake of such losses, there have been hundreds of thousands of casualties—innocent men, women, and children—as well as millions of refugees who have fled or have been forcefully uprooted, exposed to injustice, and driven from their homes. The homelands left behind are scarred, as well, because communities are fragmented by violence and war.

As leaders of various religious and faith traditions, we must oppose persecution inflicted on all the components of the social fabric especially Christians, Yazidis and other religious and ethnic groups such as Turkmen and Shabak in Iraq and Syria. Persecution of people, violating their sanctity as the case of Yazidi women and enslaving the people are ways contrary to every human conscience. Persecution and execution of people who exercise their basic human right to worship as they choose contradict noble religious ideals, as well as tear the fabric of civilization, nullifying past humanitarian gains. The effort of many religious leaders over the years to establish a shared ethic of peaceful

coexistence between all the segments of the Iraqi and Syrian societies, Christians, Muslims, Yazidis, Turkmen and Shabak.

And, because of the exposition of Islam's teachings, the Muslims' values, and civilizational role to a mutilation by extremist groups, which manipulate religion in the service of justifying its killing and destruction against Muslims and others and destructing conducts by harming the innocents, defiling states and their sovereignty, demolishing religious shrines and worshipping places, and imposing hegemonic rules and laws over citizens. These actions which stem from strange ideas that are totally incompatible with our cultures and history, contrast with the genuine Islamic teachings, and destroy the connections, not just between the followers of diverse religions, but also among the followers of the same faith.

Clearly, the region is in a fragile period of history, and the international and regional complexities of these circumstances are not easily understood, nor solved. Perhaps, the first step is to listen to the appeal of the displaced, the orphans, the widows, and the bereaved. We have gathered today as religious authorities from the Arab countries and the world, in the presence of high level governmental, intergovernmental, and civil society officials to affirm the common bond of the right of every human to follow one's own faith without fear of death or destruction. We raise a joint plea to the powerful and almighty God to strengthen us to shoulder our responsibility at this moment in history. In the shadow of these difficult circumstances, we remain sincere in our convictions, true to our religious teachings and mindful of our humanitarian values.

We gather together to listen to each other, and to think together about possibilities for cooperation to transform the crisis. It is through dialogue and the strengthening of our mutual values of citizenship, that the windows of hope and aspiration will be opened. We must tear down the barriers of fear, holding grudges and injustice, which divide people and eliminate their dreams and hopes of peace.

We gather together to declare in a unanimous voice, and to abide by the following principles and initiatives:

1- The Principles:

1- We commit ourselves to adopt dialogue as the primary and most potent for resolving conflicts and disagreements, and to support initiatives and institutions that consider dialogue the best method for constructing national peace, coexistence and promotion of common citizenship.

2- We explicitly and completely condemn the serious violation of human rights in Iraq and Syria. We share the indignation of those who have suffer these grave injustices and arbitrary abuse. Regardless a person's chosen religious tradition, they are entitled to be treated humanely and with dignity. Unchecked mass murder and bloody conflict are correctly categorized as crimes against humanity. We also reject and denounce supporting or sponsoring terrorism. We appeal to the world's leaders and governments, the League of Arab States, the Conference of Islamic Cooperation and the UN Security Council to intervene with the appropriate methods to stop these

crimes and to end the conflicts that are destructive to people and to civilization alike. Nothing justifies violating civilians or threatening their lives and livelihood.

3- We declare our solidarity with all who are oppressed due to these events, especially those who have been uprooted and displaced from their homes and homelands. We call upon relevant political powers and international community to spare no effort to restore these people to their cities and villages, and to return their houses and normal living conditions. Further, we call upon all countries who are involved in some way with this struggle, together with the international community and its international organizations to find a rapid and appropriate solution to the issue of refugees in Iraq and Syria. We call upon the world to help countries in which the current situation is threatening stability and creating a crisis in securing the necessary resources for the entire population to survive.

4- Together we repudiate all exploitation of religion in political conflict and the usurpation of religious symbols by extremists used as a means for segregation and a cause for injustice and oppression. At every official spiritual and public level, we reject the fractured teaching and defamation of values within Islam, especially by those who claim Islamic ruler-ship in Iraq and Syria and their followers. We invite all people of faith and good will to condemn these practices and to stand united against these tactics.

5- We assert that every religious, ethnic, cultural or linguistic heritage is an irreplaceable and an inherent part of the Arab culture, rooted in its history, and contributes to the vibrancy and diversity of the fabric of those communities. We also affirm that each person is vital to the future of these countries as they coexist equally with the same rights and duties to create solidarity between the Muslims and the Christians in the Middle East. Therefore, we call for the preservation of this diversity in the Arabic societies, which has been our legacy for several millennia. Diversity is both a cultural prerogative and an authentic source that reflects the different elements comprising the national identity. We proclaim the imperative need for Christians, Muslims, and other cultural and religious components to become a cohesive unit in Arab societies.

6- Building upon the past experience of Christian-Muslim coexistence, despite all of the disturbances, relapses and imperfect conduct throughout history, we affirm that this very coexistence is one of the main pillars of the Arab civilization, and serves as evidence of the mutually beneficial relationship between Muslims and Christians.

7- We call for all people to honor--without hesitation or reservation--the human rights and freedoms of every people group. We request special attention be given to freedom of belief and freedom of practicing religious rites, because these are prerequisites to protecting freedom diversity and promoting dialogue. We also stress the necessity of adopting the concept of joint citizenship, which embraces diversity and deems it foundational to executing justice and peace within societies. Peace and justice cannot be attained without regard for the rule of law and governing bodies. In addition, the role of religious institutions, in collaboration with other societal institutions, are necessary for developing citizenship by means of defining the qualities of citizenship and spreading positive values.

8- Firmly clinging to hope despite the difficulties we are facing, we must not despair or cease from the work of peace-building, and arriving at an appropriate mutual understanding between the followers of diverse religions. We appeal to all people of faith and good will, striving to build a more cooperative and peaceful world, to adopt these commitments and to work with us jointly toward achieving this goal.