



ISLAM AND CHRISTIANITY, THE GREAT CONVERGENCE: WORKING JOINTLY TOWARDS EQUAL CITIZENSHIP RIGHTS

Proceedings of the UN Geneva Side Event
Held on 15 March 2017 and Lessons Learned



GENEVA CENTRE FOR HUMAN RIGHTS ADVANCEMENT AND GLOBAL DIALOGUE
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The Geneva Centre for Human Rights
Advancement and Global Dialogue

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GENEVA, 15 MARCH 2017
PALAIS DES NATIONS

Table of Contents

INTRODUCTION	7-9
SUMMARY RECORD OF THE PANEL MEETING	11-42
DRAWING LESSONS FROM THE PANEL MEETING	43-68
ANNEX I: FULL STATEMENTS OF PARTICIPANTS	69-119
• <i>His Royal Highness Prince Hassan bin Talal</i>	
• <i>H. E. Sheikha Lubna Khalid Al Qasimi, Minister of State for Tolerance of UAE</i>	
• <i>H. E. Dr. Hanif Hassan Ali Al Qassim</i>	
• <i>Ambassador Idriss Jazairy</i>	
• <i>Ambassador Marie-Thérèse Pictet-Althann</i>	
• <i>Ambassador Tehmina Janjua</i>	
• <i>Reverend Dr. Olav Fykse Tveit</i>	
• <i>Minister Lakhdar Brahimi</i>	
• <i>Minister Tarek Mitri</i>	
• <i>Honourable Mark D. Siljander</i>	
• <i>Reverend Timothy Radcliffe</i>	
• <i>Professor Carole Hillenbrand</i>	
• <i>Ambassador Najla Riachi Assaker</i>	
• <i>Dr. Alfred de Zayas</i>	
ANNEX II: MEDIA COVERAGE	121-138
OVERVIEW OF PANEL DISCUSSIONS AND PUBLICATIONS INITIATED BY THE GENEVA CENTRE DURING THE PERIOD OF 2014-2017	139-143

INTRODUCTION

The present publication comes at a moment when heightened inter-religious tensions between Muslims and Christians have dominated the headlines of world media. Islam and Christianity are often presented as heading on a collision course and clashing with each other. The notion of the “*Clash of Civilizations*” have resulted in a misleading and distorted debate on the alleged divergences between Islam and Christianity. This has spurred the growth of populism, bigotry, discrimination and online hate campaigns targeting religious minorities in Muslim and Christian-majority countries alike. The world is moving in a direction where social diversity, inter-religious tolerance and religious co-existence are being replaced by a social climate reminiscent of the darkest chapters of humanity’s history.

In response to these challenges, I am honoured to present this publication prepared by the Geneva Centre for Human Rights Advancement and Global Dialogue (hereinafter “*The Geneva Centre*”). As part of the Geneva Centre’s efforts in building bridges between the Global North and the Global South, a panel debate was held on 15 March 2017 at the United Nations Office in Geneva (UNOG) on the subject of “*Islam and Christianity, the Great Convergence: Working Jointly Towards Equal Citizenship Rights.*” Representatives from the Muslim and Christian worlds alike sponsored this side event with the ambition of uniting Muslims and Christians in their joint aspirations to build a common future: I would like to thank the Permanent Missions of **Algeria, Lebanon and Pakistan**, as well as the **Permanent Delegation of the Sovereign Order of Malta to UN Geneva** for joining forces in this regard.

The first part of this publication addresses the main observations expressed by the panellists on “*The Great Convergence between Islam and Christianity.*” The debate became a true example of the convergence of thoughts, ideas and philosophies promulgated by distinguished Muslim and Christian speakers on the need to initiate joint initiatives towards the realization of global peace and of social harmony.

Speakers from Christian and Muslim backgrounds provided inspiring and stimulating contributions. They referred to the challenges and constraints faced by Christians in the Middle East. Societies that were once praised for their high level of tolerance and inter-faith harmony have entered into a phase of fragmentation and disintegration owing to the rise of violent extremist groups. The social and moral fabrics of multi-religious and multi-national societies have now reached a breaking point and are threatening the existence of valued social components in the Middle East. In order to restore the social harmony that once prevailed in these societies, the panellists suggested resorting to dialogue, to inter-faith cooperation and to the implementation of international human rights norms guaranteeing religious freedom. It was also encouraging to learn about joint efforts made by religious leaders to restore inter-faith harmony between Muslims and Christians in *inter alia* Iraq, Nigeria and the Central African Republic.

Contributions highlighted the common heritage between Islam and Christianity linked by their theological understanding and by their shared values. Historical examples of peaceful co-existence between Muslims and Christian reminded the audience that Islam and Christianity can live together perfectly in harmony. These societies once embraced egalitarianism as a moral compass. Tolerance and religious pluralism were perceived as the founding pillars of these societies. Nonetheless, the unprecedented rise of violent extremist groups have reduced the prospects of peaceful co-existence between religious communities to a low point. Several speakers highlighted the importance of standing united in the fight against the rise of violent extremist groups. Their deceptive attempts to seek religious legitimacy for their poisonous ideologies and for atrocities committed allegedly in the name of religion are incompatible with the original messages of Islam.

The second part of this publication offers a novel insight on the Geneva Centre's forthcoming conference on the theme of "*Religions, Creeds and/or Other Value Systems: Joining Forces to Enhance Equal Citizenship Rights*". The objective of this World Conference is to harness the joint potential of Islam and Christianity as part of a core group also encompassing other faiths as well as creeds to promote equal citizenship rights for all in such a way as to reduce resorting to a religious and non-religious sub-identity as a shelter against group discrimination. The projected World Conference to be held in 2018 could provide a push to enhance equal citizenship rights worldwide and to harness the collective energy of various religions, beliefs and value systems. I believe the World Conference will be an extraordinary opportunity to unite the voices of all

religions and creeds in addressing the growth of religious phobias, xenophobia and bigotry that have poisoned our modern societies.

In conclusion, I do hope this publication will offer an alternative narrative in building bridges between the Western and the Islamic worlds. I firmly believe that Muslims and Christians should stand united in their aspirations to build a common future. The 15 March side event enabled us to unite our forces in achieving pragmatic solutions for promoting equal and inclusive citizenship rights. It bodes well for holding the World Conference as an historical opportunity to identify models of equal and inclusive citizenship rights fostering social cohesion, inter-religious tolerance and harmony.



By H. E. Hanif Hassan Ali Al Qassim
*Chairman of the Geneva Centre for
Human Rights Advancement and Global Dialogue*

SUMMARY RECORD OF THE PANEL MEETING

The present report provides a summary record drawn up by the Geneva Centre on the discussions which took place during the panel meeting at the United Nations Office in Geneva (UNOG). It does not commit the authors of the remarks themselves whose statements, which were recorded, are reproduced in full in Annex I to the report

I Introduction

On the occasion of the 34th ordinary session of the UN Human Rights Council, **the Geneva Centre** ran a side event at the United Nations Office in Geneva (UNOG). The conference entitled “*Islam and Christianity, the Great Convergence: Working Jointly Towards Equal Citizenship Rights*” was co-sponsored by the Permanent Missions of Algeria, Pakistan and Lebanon, as well as the Permanent Observer Mission of the Sovereign Order of Malta to the United Nations Office in Geneva (UNOG) that were represented by their respective Ambassadors. The side event was held at Room XIX from 15:00 to 17:30.

The objective of the side event was to consolidate the view of the Christian and Muslim religions as vectors of peace by highlighting the theological proximity of Christianity to Islam. The goal was also to reverse the social polarization between people broadly affiliated to these two religions and the resulting marginalization of religious minorities.

The meeting was attended by over 250 participants including several dozens of permanent missions accredited to UNOG and other international organizations including many at Head of Mission level. The Director General of the International Organization for Migration (IOM) was also present during the meeting.

The primary outcome of the side event was the adoption of a draft agenda for a world conference entitled “*Religions, Creeds and/or Other Value Systems: Joining Forces to Enhance Equal Citizenship Rights*” that will build on the discussions introduced during the panel debate. The goal of the world conference would be to chart a more inclusive understanding and forward-looking discussion of equal and inclusive citizenship rights that involves value systems in the context of religious pluralism as well as of non-believers.

II Welcoming remarks

The moderator of the panel, the Geneva Centre’s Executive Director Ambassador Idriss Jazairy, made the welcoming remarks during the opening session. He introduced the panellists to the audience and underscored the importance of their commitments to further enhancing inter-faith harmony, religious tolerance and inter-religious dialogue between Muslims and Christians as the hard core of a broader-based world movement to advance equal citizenship rights. Ambassador Jazairy said: “*We are fortunate to have had such a high*

level response to the present side event on Islam and Christianity - The Great Convergence: Working jointly towards equal citizenship rights.”



Panellists of 15 March side event

The conference was opened by a special video message delivered by **His Royal Highness Prince El Hassan bin Talal of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan**. After the video message by His Royal Highness, the following speakers were given the floor:

- **H. E. Dr. Hanif Hassan Ali Al Qassim**, Chairman of the Geneva Centre’s Board of Management;
- **H. E. Ambassador Marie-Thérèse Pictet-Althann**, Permanent Observer of the Sovereign Order of Malta to the UN;
- **H. E. Ambassador Tehmina Janjua**, Permanent Representative of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan to the UN;
- **H. E. Sheikha Lubna Khalid Al Qasimi**, Minister of State for Tolerance of the United Arab Emirates (UAE);
- **Reverend Dr. Olav Fykse Tveit**, General Secretary of the World Council of Churches (WCC);
- **Minister Lakhdar Brahimi**, former Minister of Foreign Affairs of Algeria and a member of the Elders;
- **Minister Tarek Mitri**, former Acting Minister of Foreign Affairs of Lebanon. Director of the Issam Fares Institute for Public Policy and International Affairs (IFI);
- **Honourable Mark Siljander**, former U.S. / U.N. Ambassador and former US Republican Congressman. President of the think-tank Bridges to Common Ground;

- **Reverend Timothy Radcliffe**, Dominican friar of the English Province, and former Master of the Dominican Order;
- **Professor Carole Hillenbrand**, Professor of Islamic History at the University of St. Andrews (UK).



Amdassador Idriss Jazairy

Ambassador Idriss Jazairy closed the welcoming remarks by referring to the draft agenda of the forthcoming world conference requesting panel members and participants to express their views on the conference during the interactive session. *“Allow me to draw attention in this respect to the draft agenda of a World Conference on Religions, Creeds and/or Other Value Systems: Joining Forces to*

Enhance Equal Citizenship Rights which was referred to by the Panel. An explanatory note has been circulated in this hall and further copies are available. Comments thereon would be most welcome,” said Ambassador Jazairy.

The moderator also welcomed the presence of Director General of the International Organization for Migration (IOM), Ambassador William Lacy Swing. Ambassador Jazairy stated that the Geneva Centre was honoured to have the presence of the Ambassador Swing and indicated that the Director General would be given the floor after the interventions from the panellists.

III Special video message by His Royal Highness Prince El Hassan Bin Talal

Peace and the religions of Abraham (Ibrahim)

The side event was opened by a special video message delivered by **His Royal Highness Prince El Hassan Bin Talal of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan**. The common element in monotheistic religions, **HRH Prince El Hassan** told the meeting through video-link, is ‘faith and confidence in the good, human-loving, compassionate, and merciful God’. All of our religions, Judaism, Christianity and Islam, he said, consider justice and peace as gifts from God. ‘All of our religions disapprove of the religious justification of violence and inhumane actions, none of them approve of violence, terrorism or ill-treatment of human beings’. The 2001 Brussels Declaration (*“The Peace of God in the World. Towards Peaceful Coexistence and Collaboration Among the Three Monotheistic Religions: Judaism, Christianity and Islam”*) had not been heeded and, he said, we repeat at this meeting in the spirit of Judaism, *“What is hateful to you do not do to your fellow man - this is the entire law, all the rest is commentary.”* Christianity, he added, has the tradition of *“all things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them for this is the law of the Prophet.”*

Regarding the Islamic faith, he noted that *“Islam, the third and youngest of the Abrahamic family of faiths, embodied ethical codes to which both Jews and Christians and likewise subscribe in spirit.”* The Quran and the Hadiths *“are clear in the regulation of human relations and reciprocal responsibilities.”* The Prophet is quoted as saying, *“What is the rule of Islam? What is the best thing in Islam? And the answer was: to feed the hungry, to give the greeting of peace both to those one knows and to those one does not know.”*



His Royal Highness Prince El Hassan Bin Talal

He argued that for education to foster better relations among Jewish, Christian and Muslim faith groups the theory that mutual knowledge cures all is not enough. *“To know is to love. Mutual awareness and knowledge is what we would dearly promote were it not for the confrontation among co-religionists and co-nationalists,”* he said. He believed in patriotism – loving one’s

country - but he decried nationalism at the expense of another which is what emerged in the Caucasus when, for example, “*Christian Russia backed Muslim Abkhazia against Christian Georgia*” and when “*Muslim Iran played off Christian Armenia against Muslim Azerbaijan.*”

His question to the meeting and to himself was: “*do we not need to highlight the twin poles of the problem, the problem of us and the Other?*” HRH Prince El Hassan highlighted that the model of equal citizenship is about “*values that apply not to, with all the respect, brand names, but apply to promoting creative commons, based on shared values.*” He asked the meeting to imagine a Versailles – noting that 2018 will be the 100th anniversary of Treaty of Versailles – that would move towards a “*new twin pole, not the binary twin pole*” enabling the Global North and the Global South to look beyond religious divisions and work instead towards common values.

In this spirit, he looked forward to the recommendations of the panel stating: “*I salute you and look forward to your recommendations.*”

IV Opening remarks

Tolerance and religious harmony are embedded in the founding principles of Islam and Christianity

After the video message, the moderator gave the floor to the Chairman of the Geneva Centre, **Dr. Hanif Hassan Ali Al Qassim**. In his opening remarks, the **Geneva Centre’s Chairman** expressed his most sincere gratitude to the Permanent Missions of Algeria, Lebanon, Pakistan, and to the Permanent Observer Mission of the Sovereign Order of Malta, for their commitments to co-hosting the panel debate. Dr. Al Qassim referred to the four co-sponsors as a symbol of religious unity in which Muslims and Christians work jointly to address issues of mutual concern and draw on the potential of “*inter-religious cooperation.*”



Chairman of the Geneva Centre Dr. Al Qassim

The Chairman of the Geneva Centre also thanked the diplomatic missions represented by their respective Ambassadors and counsellors, the panel members and the Director General of the International Organization for Migration (IOM) for attending the panel debate. He referred to their presence as a sign of *“hope for solutions that address the rise of intolerance and violence.”*

Dr. Al Qassim noted that *“Arab, Christian and Jewish societies had once lived together as peaceful and thriving neighbours, joined together for societal reasons with inter-religious and multi-cultural tolerance.”* By contrast, today the rise of violent conflicts, both at international and local levels, have strained the social fabric of peaceful and inclusive societies. The resulting power vacuums have provided fertile ground for the proliferation of extremist and violent groups that have hijacked religious faiths to justify their deadly ideologies. The Chairman stated: *“This deadly ideology has swept the Middle East and Africa and a spill-over effect is regrettably occurring more broadly, in locations we once considered out of reach.”*



Panellists observing a minute of silence

In commemoration of all victims who have perished from the inhuman actions of violent and extremist groups, the Chairman invited the audience to observe a minute of silence. He made this gesture to express solidarity and compassion to all victims of violence irrespective of religion, creed and/or other value systems.

Then he quoted Pope Francis stating: *“There are fundamentalist and violent individuals in all peoples and religions – and with intolerant generalisations they become stronger because they feed on hate and xenophobia.”* He referred to the Pope’s observations as *“very true words”* as it shows the reality of today’s world in which the rise of right-wing and populist movements trigger *“the disruptive effects of political and civil unrest, the scale of which causes serious alarm.”*

In order to overcome this inauspicious context, Dr. Al Qassim suggested the

need to target and to strengthen interfaith dialogue to promote the principles of tolerance and religious harmony embedded in the founding principles of Islam and Christianity. *“Both the Quran and the Bible teach the faithful to pursue peace and tolerance and both preach love,”* he noted. In this regard, the Chairman presented the examples of the Charter of Medina during the Holy Prophet’s lifetime and the 1970 *“Guidelines for Dialogue between Christians and Muslims”* of the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue as concrete attempts by Muslims and Christians to promote inter-faith dialogue.

Referring to the statement made by the UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres during the 2017 *“High-Level Forum on Combating Anti-Muslim Discrimination and Hatred,”* where he warned against the rise of discrimination, the Chairman suggested that the *“spirit of the United Nations”* should direct societies towards *“peaceful co-existence through inter-religious empathy.”* He concluded stating that the side event is an important opportunity to *“discuss the convergences between Islam and Christianity and continue our joint efforts combining our strengths to promote equal citizenship rights.”*

IV Deliberations from the panellists

Condemning religious fanaticism



Ambassador Marie-Thérèse
Pictet-Althann

The first panellist to be given the floor by the moderator was **Ambassador Marie-Thérèse Pictet-Althann**. During her deliberation, the Permanent Observer of the Sovereign Order of Malta to the UN, explained that Article 7 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights implies that the founding pillar of equal citizenship rights should be based on the principle of non-discrimination in which equal treatment and equal protection of all citizens are guaranteed, regardless of religious specificities. Minorities need to be able to *“fully participate in the activities and decision-making process of their communities so as to avoid becoming a*

sub-group and thus being marginalized which in turn jeopardizes social harmony,” she noted during her intervention. It was also suggested that non-discrimination and equal participation should include *“internally displaced and stateless persons*

whose human and citizenship rights are often neglected and even denied.”

Ambassador Pictet-Althann also devoted her intervention to caution against the rising trends of intolerance, hatred, discrimination and persecution targeting specifically faith-based minorities. *“Across the world today Christians, Muslims and many other religious communities experience intolerance, hatred, discrimination and persecution,”* she noted. Consequently, she said, some UN member-states *“are considering introducing the term ‘Christianophobia’”* to identify anti-Christian sentiments and prejudices witnessed around the world, alongside the already existing term of *“Islamophobia.”*

As a solution to address religious intolerance, Ambassador Pictet-Althann suggested that states need to ensure the implementation of international norms that have already been ratified. States need to create national legislation guaranteeing equal citizenship rights irrespective of religious denominations and beliefs. *“National authorities and political parties should foster participation, tolerance and dialogue within communities,”* she noted. It was also proposed that religious leaders should have a stronger role to address such matters through an alliance *“between religious and political components of a society.”* According to Ambassador Pictet-Althann, this *“can be exercised through different channels, such as inter and intra-faith dialogue and cooperation between religious and political components of society.”* The speaker referred to the courageous decision taken by the Cardinal Archbishop of Bangui, the Chief Imam and the Protestant leader who decided to form the Interfaith Peace Platform to facilitate peaceful reconciliation following the end of the country’s civil war.

Resorting to dialogue has also been the cornerstone of recent efforts made by the Holy See and the Al-Azhar University in Cairo to enable high-level discussions between Christian and Muslim leaders. In addition to inter-religious dialogue, Ambassador Pictet-Althann also suggested *“that human rights education and training on minority rights, non-discrimination and equality, freedom of religion or belief”* can be *“encouraged at grass-roots levels”* to promote inter-religious and inter-faith dialogue. The Sovereign Order of Malta’s *“most moving experiences in interfaith cooperation”*, Ambassador Pictet-Althann emphasized, is in Lebanon where *“veiled Muslim nurses”* in clinics operated by the Sovereign Order of Malta wear the Order’s Cross. This constitutes, she said, the *“main response to fanaticism and extremism while illustrating the need to translate our good words into action.”*

The Ambassador quoted from the address given by the Order of Malta’s Foreign Minister at the Symposium *“Religions Together for Humanitarian Action”* held

at the Palais des Nations in May 2015. *“Perhaps the answer to conflicts with a religious element is not less religion”* he had said, *“but more of religion’s peaceful, non-violent content as a rich source of reconciliation, social tolerance, devotion, humanitarian commitment, empowerment and peace-building.”* We should aim, stated Ambassador Pictet-Althann, *“to identify a model of inclusive citizenship rights that is firmly based on the values promoted by Christianity and Islam.”*

In her concluding remarks, the Permanent Observer of the Sovereign Order of Malta highlighted that the Geneva Centre’s forthcoming world conference should illustrate the *“interface between positive law and religion.”* Christian and Muslim religious leaders should *“promote the principle of non-discrimination by supporting existing international and domestic legal instruments and mechanisms; and by reaffirming this principle in common declarations, actions and approaches.”* Ambassador Pictet-Althann also proposed that the world conference should include practical recommendations to bridge the gap between *“the adoption of legal instruments by States and the effective implementation on the ground.”*

Theology is not the root of the problem

Following Ambassador Pictet-Althann’s inspiring statement, the floor was given to the **Permanent Representative of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan Ambassador Tehmina Janjua**. Ambassador Janjua said that if we are to address the issue of citizenship rights/minorities globally, then we need to go beyond the relationship of Christianity and Islam, beyond viewing this issue from the perspective of religion alone. Although the issue of citizenship rights has been highlighted *“by the situation of Muslim communities in Europe”* it is only one amongst a complex of factors. *“Historical, political, economic, cultural and democratic factors are probably of greater significance,”* she said.



Ambassador Tehmina Janjua

Ambassador Janjua argued that to secure the rights of minority communities we must remain focused on *“economic and political drivers behind the worsening situation”* of these communities. Failure to address the anxieties of majority and minority communities, she said, will surrender *“political space to the more extreme elements.”* She warned that the *“dynamic has been unleashed in Europe”* and is also *“being witnessed in a depressingly large number of countries in other parts of the world.”*

Ambassador Janjua likewise highlighted the importance of countering and addressing the rhetoric of prejudice targeting faith-based minorities. The operationalization of United Nations Human Rights Resolution 16/18 *“Combating intolerance, negative stereotyping and stigmatization of, and discrimination, incitement to violence, and violence against, persons based on religion or belief”* enables stakeholders to engage in a rights-based discourse that could counter challenges related to discriminatory rhetoric. Ambassador Janjua said:

“While I would maintain the primacy of political and economic factors, it is true that in many cases, these factors have been submerged by a poisonous religious and cultural rhetoric. Hence, the immediate challenge in such cases is to urgently counter the rhetoric of prejudice, of difference, and of exclusion.”

In her closing remarks, Ambassador Janjua suggested the adoption of the following measures to ensure *“the operationalization of resolution 16/18”*:

- *“I: Setting up an observatory within the office of High Commissioner to catalogue instances of hate speech, xenophobia, and even concrete evidence of attacks against any religious community/individuals.*
- *“II: Regular reporting by all Member States on efforts undertaken to implement resolution 16/18.*
- *“III: Setting up of a mechanism even Special Rapporteur to address the issues reflected in 16/18.*
- *“IV: A comprehensive debate within the Human Rights Council to see how to examine the issues addressed in 16/18 are being looked at and implemented in member states.”*

The religions of love

The third speaker to address the audience was **H. E. Minister of State for Tolerance of the United Arab Emirates (UAE), Sheikha Lubna Khalid Al Qasimi**. The core message of divine religions, said the **UAE Minister of State for Tolerance**, is the message of love. *“We all share the same teachings: of justice, social equality, compassion, respect, peace and non-violence. Muslim-*

Christian dialogue dates back to the rise of Islam in the seventh century. We share a common heritage. For more than fourteen centuries, our communities of faith have been linked by their theological understandings and by geographical proximity.”

The UAE Minister ascertained the need to “*develop strategies that would pave the way towards the promotion of equal citizenship rights for Muslims and Christians.*” The speaker suggested that this would be achieved through engaging in dialogue between Muslims and Christians, granting equal protection and “*accepting the diversity of each other*” that would foster peaceful reconciliation. She likewise underlined that Muslims and Christians share the fundamental value of human dignity, derived from the “*scriptural and theological traditions*” forming an integral part of humanity’s moral fabric.

Referring to the UAE as a role model for religious tolerance, the Minister of State informed the audience that the UAE decided in 2015 to enact the “*Anti-Discrimination Law*” that criminalizes “*all forms of discrimination regardless of religion, race, ethnicity or gender.*” The UAE has also created the first ministerial post for promoting tolerance and has recently launched the UAE National Program for Tolerance with the aim of continuing “*to build up tolerance,*” and to “*nurture the culture of acceptance of the other.*” To illustrate with relevant examples, the UAE Minister mentioned that her country is implementing various initiatives such as “*The International Institute for Tolerance*” and “*The Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid Award for Tolerance*” to provide support to Arab scholars and international researchers working in the field of tolerance.



UAE Minister of State for Tolerance

The speaker also devoted her presentation to highlighting the existing convergences between Islam and Christianity stating that both religions “*share the same teachings of justice, social equality, compassion, respect, peace and non-violence.*” In this context, she said, “*religious pluralism and civic rights were the core pillars of the Muslims Nation (The Ummah).*” The Minister noted that the Prophet enabled establishing a pluralistic society in which “*citizenship and equal rights were granted to all people regardless of religious beliefs and practices.*” In turn, this allowed Islam to promote and emphasize social justice, individual freedom and social equality “*as a way of living.*”

Taking inspiration from the pluralistic society that was established during the era of the Prophet, the participants were reminded that the UAE shares the “*universal responsibility to respect cultural diversity*” and to promote religious freedom. The Minister noted that more than 120 churches are located in the UAE and close to 200 nationalities live in the country. “*This freedom of belief and debate has largely contributed to the great economic, cultural and social success of the UAE over the last 45 years,*” she said.

In her concluding remarks, the UAE Minister of Tolerance encouraged all stakeholders to “*work together to build more tolerant, peaceful and coexisting societies for our present and future generations.*”

Christians condemn the invasions



Reverend Dr. Olav Fykse Tveit

The **General Secretary of the World Council of Churches (WCC) Reverend Dr. Olav Fykse Tveit** underscored in his deliberation that the theme of the side event is a good starting-point to work jointly towards the promotion of equal and inclusive citizenship rights as an expression of the deepest faith of both religions in God as the Creator of humanity. Dr. Tveit highlighted that Muslims and

Christians are mutually accountable to one another and to humanity. They “*represent half of the world’s population*” and they symbolize “*humanity in many ways.*” Working jointly towards equal citizenship rights is an expression of the joint commitments to humanity to express “*our deepest faith in God*

creating the one humanity.”

He described a visit by the Grand Imam of Al-Azhar, together with several members of the Muslim Council of Elders, to the World Council’s Ecumenical Institute at Bossey near Geneva. The Grand Imam, said Dr. Tveit, represents an institute that has millions of students while the World Council has only fifty at Bossey. *“But we believe we have the same purpose,”* he said, *“namely to be a place where we work together to understand one another, and what are one another’s shared faith and values.”*

In February 2017, Dr. Tveit and his colleagues had *“led church leaders from different parts of the world to Iraq to visit both the Christian leadership and the leadership of other faiths, particularly of the Muslim faith”* in Iraq. Dr. Tveit said the delegation was *“given many examples of why there was such an opportunity to find a way to rebuild Iraq as a country of people of many faiths.”* They learnt the need to *“pay attention to what was taught in schools about one another.”* When they asked about the curriculum in Iraq, they discovered that there was no awareness in textbooks of a centuries-old Christian presence. The word ‘Minorities’ is dubious, said Dr. Tveit, because it suggests quite wrongly that such groups do not *“really belong”* to societies.

Lastly, Dr. Tveit referred to the example of Nigeria in which a joint institute was recently established by Muslim and Christian local leaders in Kaduna enabling Muslims and Christians, who had experienced hate crimes, to present each other’s stories. The objective of this institution would be to foster greater awareness about the implications of hate crimes and nurture reconciliation between both religious groups.

In his concluding remarks, the WCC General Secretary highlighted that challenges also exist in the Western world related to the implementation of equal citizenship rights as a result of the rise of populist parties. Therefore, the sense of *“one humanity”*, he said, needs to prevail to enable people to claim a basis of belonging as equal citizens in a state. The unjust treatment of refugees and the denial of refuge to certain people owing to their religious beliefs are clear examples of practices that do not belong in the 21st century and are contradictory to the concept of equal and inclusive citizenship rights. Dr. Tveit said:

“We are very ashamed and we hope that this will not be what we will see in many parts of Europe or other parts of the world, whether it is in the name of our religion or in the name of other religions.”

There are no minorities

Following the insightful deliberation of the WCC General Secretary, **Minister Lakhdar Brahimi**, Algeria's former foreign minister and a man who had brokered important world peace agreements, praised the *“side event and the creative idea of a World Conference to address issues of paramount importance not only for Christians and Muslims but for humankind as a whole.”*

During this deliberation, Minister Brahimi spoke about four factors that would require further attention. Firstly, the violence targeting Christians in Muslim majority countries is becoming a growing issue of concern. Minister Brahimi was dismayed by the hijacking of Islam by criminal groups such as Daesh, Al-Qaeda, and Boko-Haram, and other likeminded groups, to provide religious legitimacy to their barbaric crimes. Given the current circumstances, Minister Brahimi stated that he *“fully understood that Christians”* were fleeing the volatile and precarious situation in the Middle East in which they were being targeted by violent and extremist groups. He refused to call Christians in countries such as Syria, Iraq, Egypt and Lebanon ‘minorities’. Their roots in these countries were *“as deep, if not deeper, than those of anyone else.”*



Minister Lakhdar Brahimi

Minister Brahimi was grateful to the countries that were offering them asylum and expressed the view that these countries would *“not readily give them nationality and that most, if not all of them will come back to their countries of origin.”* Although he warned against the dire situation witnessed in many Muslim majority countries, the speaker gave numerous examples of Muslims who have put their lives at risk in courageous attempts to protect their Christian compatriots from violence and discrimination carried out by extremist groups. Minister Brahimi told the audience:

“When Daesh first entered the Syrian Province of Rakka in Syria, they damaged the Cross of a local church. In the Middle of the night, 7 young men climbed on the roof of the Church and, at the peril of their lives, repaired the damage. In Indonesia, when young thugs calling themselves Muslim tried to prevent Christians from attending Midnight Mass on Christmas night in an Indonesian village, young Muslims accompanied and protected their Christian compatriots.”

Secondly, Minister Brahimi underscored that the Sunni-Shia divide is becoming Islam’s long devastating war threatening to further destabilize the volatile situation in the Middle East. The Minister also highlighted the importance of addressing the poorly managed conflicts in Libya, Syria, Iraq and Yemen that could threaten the stability in the Arab region. Minister Brahimi suggested that the Geneva Centre includes this as one of the key issues to be addressed during the forthcoming world conference.

Thirdly, it was also highlighted by the speaker that the Palestinian question can no longer be neglected and should occupy pride of place in the agenda of the world conference. The combination of arrogant extremism and softly expressed sympathy towards the Palestinians will not lead to a long-term solution to the perennial conflict. The Minister warned that Israel’s policy is moving *“toward an Apartheid Regime”* that could *“lead to Palestinian counter-violence in the form of a new Intifada or another form of violent struggle.”*

Lastly, Minister Brahimi put forward the idea that the Geneva Centre’s forthcoming world conference should unite similar initiatives under one banner. It was therefore suggested that the Geneva Centre should consider contacting like-minded organizations to join forces and to further advance the agenda of the world conference.

Rights of the Dhimmi (protected People of the Book) and citizenship rights

After Minister Brahimi’s deliberation, the former acting minister of foreign affairs of Lebanon **Minister Tarek Mitri** gave an historical overview of the evolution of the concept of equal citizenship rights. As part of the break-up process of the former Ottoman Empire during the 20th century and the decolonization process that followed, Muslims and Christians in the Middle East were historically united in their common fight for national self-determination and for the creation of nation-states based on *“universalizing ideologies.”* The ethno-cultural communalities between Christians and Muslims and the *“pact of citizenship,”* he said, formed the basis of numerous modern nation states, as was the case in Egypt and in Palestine. *“In the latter part of the 19th century and in the early 20th century,”* he added, *“Christians played a role in shaping a new*

social and political order that far outweighed their numerical importance.” It was emphasized by Minister Mitri that “their contributions, more in culture than in political activity, attempted to shake loose their minority status and identity. The nation-states that emerged from the empire, including modern Turkey, came as a rejection of the Ottoman past.”



Minister Tarek Mitri

Dr. Mitri also assessed the implications of the recent Arab uprising or revolutions on modern societies. The speaker underscored that the transformations witnessed in the Middle East came in an “*unanticipated manner*” in which the “*rapid and unanticipated collapse of the old order*” have led to an absence of the rule of law and to a “*fragility of national cohesion of identity*” in which members of communities

plead for a power structure protecting them from another community. In the long run, the Minister warned that this could give rise to the “*reinvention of sub-national identities*” that could further polarize the Arab region. Dr. Mitri highlighted that the “*pact of citizenship necessitates the rebuilding of state institutions on the principle of the rule of law*” and of inclusion of all citizens irrespective of cultural, ethnic or religious differences.

The Minister ended his deliberation by referring to a statement made by Dr. Ahmad al Tayyib, the Grand Iman of Al-Azhar, during the joint international Christian-Muslim conference entitled “*Freedom, citizenship, diversity and integration*” held in February 2017 in Cairo. During this conference, the Grand Iman re-iterated the importance of resorting to equal citizenship rights, equality and the rule of law to overcome religious intolerance. The Grand Imam also warned against the excessive use of minorities that would imply “*discrimination and separation*” of communities. Minister Mitri expressed the hope that the statements of the Grand Iman would serve as an inspiration for making new policies based on a model of equal and inclusive citizenship rights. Minister Mitri noted:

“In a context where minority-centered concerns are on the rise, emigration of Christians - whether forced or voluntary - reaching unprecedented levels, mounting fears and uncertainties, the statements of Al-Azhar gain greater significance and timeliness. In opposing fragmentation of our societies, they point to policies different from what we see. Let us hope that they contribute to the making of new policies.”

Jesus and Mary in Islam

Following Minister Mitri's intervention, **Ambassador Mark Siljander, the former US Republican Congressman and the author of the book *"A Deadly Misunderstanding, Quest to Bridge the Muslim/Christian Divide,"*** presented his personal encountering with Islam and the teachings of the Quran. Siljander bravely admitted that he had *"once disliked Muslims and the Quran"* until he had forced himself to read the Holy Book of Islam. Reading the Quranic Sura of Mary, he learnt that Jesus was born of a virgin birth, was considered to be the 'breath' or spirit of God and is mentioned about 60 times. Following a comparative theological study between the Quran and Aramaic language associated with the three Abrahamic holy books, Ambassador Siljander arrived at the conclusion that Islam, Christianity and Judaism share numerous commonalities that could become the starting point of a joint effort towards the promotion of equal and inclusive citizenship rights.



Honourable Mark D. Siljander

Illustrating his view with practical examples, the speaker shared his personal encountering in 2004 with the President of Sudan, Omar al Bashir, and the former Foreign Minister of Sudan, Ali Karti. The meeting became an opportunity to discuss the commonalities between Islam and Christianity that were used as a starting-point to identify solutions to problems that existed between Sudan and the United States (US). At the time of the meeting, the President of Sudan objected to the deployment of UN Peacekeepers in Darfur in line with UN resolutions 1593 and 1706 as it was considered as a violation of the principle of territorial integrity and of the principle of sovereignty of Sudan. In order to overcome this delicate situation, President Bashir requested Ambassador Siljander to propose a solution and a compromise to the political stalemate.

A new resolution was adopted that included the deployment of a hybrid force composed of UN and African forces in Darfur enabling the humanitarian situation on the ground to improve and the parties to find a satisfactory outcome.

Ambassador Siljander also referred to the example of the US Congressional Prayer Breakfast Groups in which members of Congress meet together on a weekly basis to build friendly bonds and pray for each other. This initiative, he said, *“became our template for igniting hope in desperate international crises, and offering help initiating peaceful reconciliation.”*

The speaker concluded by calling upon the Geneva Centre to convene a global conference to evaluate new convergences between Muslims and Christians. Ambassador Siljander made the following observation: *“In this light, I call on the Centre to convene a global conference to more deeply evaluate these new findings of the similarities of matters that Muslims and Christian have historically considered ‘heretical.’”*

Rejoicing in the Other



Reverend Timothy Radcliffe

The former Master of the Dominican Order of Preachers, Father Timothy Radcliffe, emphasized that the stranger, the so often feared ‘other’, should be rejoiced in rather than feared. The Reverend reiterated that populism, xenophobia and the *“fear of the stranger”* are becoming the norms of today’s societies. Religions are being misused, he noted, by

fundamentalist and nationalist forces advocating a simplistic and one-dimensional understanding of the world in which religion is used to legitimize political projects. Differences related to religion, ethnicity and culture are being presented as obstacles polarizing communities. *“There is nationalistic fundamentalism and, of course, religious fundamentalism, which claims that our faith can be reduced to a simplistic, literalistic reading of our sacred texts. Religion is not the source of the violence, but the infection of religion with fundamentalism, which is contrary to all true religion,”* observed Father Radcliffe.

After the murder by an Islamist militant of Bishop Claverie of Oran in Algeria, a man Father Radcliffe had venerated, hundreds of Muslims had attended

Claverie's memorial service, proclaiming him *their* bishop. "*I not only accept that the Other is Other*", said Claverie, "*a distinct subject with freedoms of conscience, but I accept that he or she may possess a part of the truth that I do not have, and without which my own search for truth cannot be fully realized.*" Christianity and Islam "*have a vital contribution to make*", he said, in enabling people to embrace "*the stranger in his or her difference.*"

To overcome the fearmongering that prevails in many countries, the Reverend argued that the three Abrahamic religions could challenge "*this fear of difference*" jointly through their spiritual teachings and relationship with God. Reacting spontaneously to Ambassador Siljander's intervention, Father Radcliffe underscored the importance to "*never fear the stranger, in his or her difference, because they will be a source of richness.*" Islam and Christianity, to whom most human beings belong, should be at the forefront of reducing the fear of difference and "*of opposing all xenophobia,*" noted the speaker.

In his conclusion, Father Radcliffe ascertained that the state cannot expect all of its citizens to submit to its will and claim exclusive loyalty as this would constitute "*another form of fundamentalism.*" However, states must protect the rights of citizens to "*live by other deeper loyalties.*" Therefore, Christianity and Islam should stand together in protecting the freedom of conscience of minorities provided that they do not threaten the public good. "*All the great religions can unite in the protection of the dignity of each human being in his or her pursuit of the truth,*" concluded Father Radcliffe in his praiseworthy deliberation.

Schools must spread knowledge of all religions

The last speaker to take the floor was **Professor Carole Hillenbrand, Professor Islamic History at the University of St. Andrews**, who said that we must "*remind ourselves that what Muslims and Christians share is much more than what divides them.*" She also highlighted the importance of creating common ground between Muslims and Christians through the promotion of "*knowledge, tolerance and good will*" that "*must be the weapons to overcome the ignorance and prejudice peddled by the media and the Internet.*" She reminded the audience that Muslims and Christians share religious scriptures and spiritual truths about "*this life and the hereafter.*" School curricula is a good starting-point to "*introduce children to major faiths*" and raise awareness about "*their festivals and rituals,*" she said.



Professor Carole Hillenbrand

Professor Hillenbrand also spoke about the importance of addressing the fear of the other religion expressed in the notions of “*Islamophobia*” and “*Christianophobia*.” “*Greater reciprocal understanding*”, she observed, is key to counter religious prejudice and hatred targeting Muslims and Christians alike. It is important to jointly address the adverse impacts of the Christian Crusades and the Arab Muslim conquests throughout history. The impacts of Western imperialism is also a subject that cannot remain neglected as the implications of colonialism are still felt in many countries of the world. It is equally important to recognise the “*profound cultural and scientific interplay between Islam and Christianity*” as having enriched both religions.

In response to the distorting effects of globalization, this “*lends a new urgency*” to break down borders and cultural barriers between peoples and races to foster better understanding. The latter can be achieved by combatting religious persecution of religious minorities, promoting inter-faith programmes and addressing hostility by proclaiming that both Christian and Muslim beliefs are in accord with democratic principles and that both faiths share a similar ethical standpoint. The power of the media needs to be harnessed, she said, to “*promote positive aspects of each culture rather than the problems often associated with it.*” In addition, the “*silent majority must speak up*” and denounce voices of hostility, extremism and scapegoating of entire societies to roll back “*Christianophobia*” and “*Islamophobia*” that have become the norms in many societies.

Lastly, the speaker made several practical suggestions regarding the implementation of concerted policies to deal with phobias targeting Muslims and Christians alike. It was suggested that in societies with a diversity of religious minorities, political rights of minorities should be upheld and “*reflected in*

the structure” of national governments. Freedom of worship and of religious practice, she said, should similarly be *“specifically acknowledged as an inalienable principle.”* Religious groups can also be empowered by operating a *“minimum recruitment quota”* in key professions such as in civil service, armed forces, police, education and health services. Freedom of worship and of religious practice should be specifically acknowledged as an inalienable and inviolable principle. Flexibility should also be shown in relation to legal matters that concern certain specific religious issues. Professions should be open to all religious minorities. The status of women should also be improved in terms of social, economic and religious terms. Addressing the *“prevalence of gender stereotyping and discrimination,”* she noted, are important to foster gender equality and gender empowerment as basic human rights.

The speaker welcomed the holding of the world conference as it would provide an instrument for Islam and Christianity to work together to secure equal citizenship rights for all, and to address prevailing misinterpretations and challenges blocking social progress. Professor Hillenbrand concluded:

“The proposed World Conference will, we may hope, provide an instrument for Islam and Christianity to work together to secure equal citizenship for all. With goodwill, resolve and a spirit of cooperation, we can make a better world.”

V Interactive session with the audience

We need to capture the high ground of the Great Abrahamic religions



IOM Director General Ambassador Lacy Swing

Following the panel deliberations from the speakers, **IOM’s Director General Ambassador Lacy Swing** said he was honoured to be present at the side event and to have had the opportunity to listen to the *“brilliant presentations”* by the speakers. Putting the main points evoked by the panellists into a broader context, Ambassador Swing noted that *“we are in the middle of a perfect storm.*

In my long life, at least, I have never noted a period in which we have so many simultaneous complex and protracted crises, armed conflicts and humanitarian emergencies from the Western bulge of Africa well into the Himalayas.”

The unfortunate thing is that there is nothing on the horizon offering short-term or medium-term solutions to any of these challenges, Ambassador Swing

argued. There is an absence of moral authority, abuse of humanitarian law and an appalling lack of political courage. Among these challenges, there is rising xenophobia and anti-foreign sentiments making it even more difficult to manage the current situation. In addition to this, Ambassador Swing highlighted the importance of capturing the “*high ground*” trying to recall the core universal messages of the great Abrahamic religions. They carry the messages, he said, that people belong to one family “*telling the same history of the creation of one humanity under one God.*”

In order for the forthcoming world conference to achieve its objectives, Ambassador Swing suggested that the following issues should be explored:

- (1) Address the disasters witnessed around the world;
- (2) Deal with the demographic imbalances between the Global South and the Global North;
- (3) Embrace the concept of diversity that has, historically, been overwhelmingly positive for many countries;
- (4) Change the toxic public discourse about the movement of people, foreigners and the other.

Ambassador Swing ended his statement stating: “*I want to thank you for that and congratulate you on this initiative today, and for that of holding a world conference. You certainly have our full support.*”

Lebanon as the role-model for religious harmony and inter-faith coexistence



Ambassador Najla Riachi Assaker

re-iterated that Lebanon is a true example of the great convergence between Islam and Christianity owing to “*its very special social fabric*” composed of its 18 different religious communities “*that have been coexisting there for many*

Following the outstanding intervention by IOM’s Director General, the **Permanent Representative of the Lebanese Republic Ambassador Najla Riachi Assaker** was given the opportunity to speak to the audience. As one of the co-sponsors of the side event.

Ambassador Riachi Assaker

centuries.” The “*whole historic and constitutional construction of the State of Lebanon is based on the principles of freedom of religion and belief, as well as on the freedom of practising all religious rites that are enshrined in its Constitution*”, she said. Ambassador Assaker argued that Lebanon is the glimmer of hope in the Middle East region and stands out as a positive example of peaceful coexistence between different religious groups living in the country.

Explaining how Lebanon can serve as a role model for other societies seeking to enhance interreligious relations between Christians and Muslims, Ambassador Assaker said, firstly, that living peacefully together in a common citizenship “*is a vital experience in everyday’s life.*” The population of Lebanon share the same concerns, hope and fears as well as “*common social, economic and political interests creating strong bonds.*” There is a “*broad consensus,*” she observed, among the Lebanese people that this structure is of utmost importance for the unity of the country and that it should be “*preserved by all means.*”

Secondly, the Lebanese cultural scene has made efforts aiming at promoting interreligious communication, such as the “*Christian-Muslim Committee for Dialogue,*” enabling religious leaders and leading figures from the Lebanese society to get involved in inter-religious dialogue.

Thirdly, Ambassador Assaker noted that the “*Lebanese Foundation for Interfaith Studies and Spiritual Solidarity*” (ADYAN) aims at holding parallel inter-faith initiatives giving prominent roles to “*more ordinary members of the different Christian and Muslim communities*” in Lebanon to work on building “*coexistence in pluralistic societies.*” They aspire to highlight diversity “*as an added value,*” to build trust and social solidarity within the society, to provide help to people in need and to identify common values and interests between the religious communities.

Fourthly, civil society has played a precious role in “*broadening the common public space where people can cooperate on all relevant issues, across their diverse religious backgrounds,*” stated Ambassador Assaker.

Lastly, Lebanon possesses a special constitution and political system, she said, that is based on a “*broad consensus*” and power-sharing mechanisms between the different ethnic and religious groups, that has enabled building trust and mutual respect and understanding of “*each community’s vital interests, and on the condition of respecting religious sensitivities and avoiding unnecessary provocations.*” Ambassador Assaker ended her insightful intervention suggesting that religious diversity should be preserved and strengthened through education, history teaching and a “*constant mémorialisation process*

as religious diversity should be never taken for granted.”

Increase of radical and biased speeches are pushing the world towards the “eye of the storm”

The next speaker to take the floor was the **Permanent Representative of the Sultanate of Oman Abdullah Nasser Al Rahbi**, who greeted the Geneva Centre for taking the initiative to arrange this panel debate. Special praise was also given to the panel members - in particular to His Royal Highness Prince el Hassan bin Talal, to the UAE Minister of State for Tolerance, to Minister Lakhdar Brahimi and to Minister Tarek Mitri for their presence and contributions. Ambassador Al Rahbi devoted the first part of his intervention warning against the increase of radical and hate speeches targeting religious minorities. This reality, he said, is pushing the world further towards the “*eye of the storm.*” A conflation of Islam with terrorism is misleading as the rise of terrorism cannot be attributed as belonging to one religion notably when the majority of victims of terrorism are Muslims, observed Ambassador Al Rahbi.



Ambassador Abdullah Nasser Al Rahbi

In order to overcome these prevailing challenges, the speaker highlighted that the Sultanate of Oman has taken numerous efforts to promote religious co-existence and inter-faith harmony. Appropriate social and economic measures have been implemented to enhance equality among its citizens. In collaboration with academics and religious leaders, education and curriculums were amended to give more space to inter-faith understanding. Awareness raising and inter-religious dialogue have been used as methods to bring people together. Seminars, meetings and programmes on Islam and religious dialogue are held in Oman and in other countries on a regular basis to all people irrespective of religious beliefs and denominations. *“We have established a Centre for*

Culture and Science which plays a vital role in bringing awareness to the community,” he said, which has been *“attended by Muslims, Christians and Jews.”* **Ambassador Al Rahbi also noted** that Sultan Qaboos bin Said al Said of Oman is actively collaborating with various countries to further discover the convergences among religions. The ambition is to build bridges between people and to enhance inter-faith understanding.

In his concluding remarks, Ambassador Al Rahbi stated that the spirit of religion and its values are one, and they are in favour of humanity. *“What we have heard today is the small cell that will increase towards more peace,”* he concluded.

The convergence of religions will deliver peace and progress



UN Independent Expert Dr. de Zayas

In his intervention, the **United Nations (UN) Independent Expert on the Promotion of a Democratic and Equitable International Order Dr. Alfred de Zayas** underscored that Muslims and Christians – representing more than half of humanity – have a joint responsibility to *“put our values into practice.”* This would enable, he noted, advancing

world peace and the promotion of human rights for all people irrespective of religious beliefs and denominations. The literary criticism by St. Francis of Assisi in his *Laudes Creaturarum* and by the Islamic philosopher Ibn Rushd in his literary treatises on Aristotle, he said, demonstrate the commonalities of the *“human family and their potential to promote convergence and social justice.”* Pope Francis and the Grand Imam of the Al-Azhar University in Cairo have also made common commitments to promote peace. In 2016, for instance, Pope Francis rejected the tendency of some politicians and media to conflate Islam with terrorism. Dr. de Zayas quoted Pope Francis stating: *“If I speak of Islamic violence, I have to speak of Catholic violence... terrorism grows when there is no other option and when money is made a god... That is the first form of terrorism.”*

Solutions to overcome the growing radicalization and instrumentalisation of religions, he noted, could include the option of using social education to instil in young people the positive values of religion and solidarity. *“Religion calls for tolerance,”* stated Dr. de Zayas, but warned that religious followers could

fall into the trap of extremists who misuse religion and transform their original meaning “*of peace into one of violence.*” We must “*abandon materialism*” and cultivate “*our spirituality,*” noted the UN Independent Expert, suggesting that religious teachings carry the messages of mutual respect and promote the idea of living in solidarity with each other. Christians and Muslims should not fear one other as “*commonalities surpass our differences.*” Dr. de Zayas suggested that existing convergences – related to human values, empathy, cooperation and consciousness of equal citizenship– unite both religious groups.

In his concluding remarks, he welcomed the efforts made by the Geneva Centre in highlighting existing convergences between Islam and Christianity. “*The convergence of world religions and world literature, the joint venture to reach out to each other, will yet deliver peace and progress for future generations,*” concluded Dr. de Zayas in his intervention.

Scholars and religious leaders must bear part of the responsibility for the growth of terrorism



First Secretary Mr. Adel Alakhder

Following the intervention of the UN Independent Expert, **the First Secretary of the Libyan Permanent Mission Mr. Adel Alakhder** spoke about the importance of addressing “*the misinterpretation of the scriptures which is the main problem for political discourse or any other discourse.*” Scholars of the three Abrahamic religions – Islam, Christianity and Judaism – he said

must bear part of the responsibility for the growth of terrorism and for the clashes of religions. Religious leaders preaching fanatical and extremist doctrines need to be stopped in their incitement to hatred and religious intolerance to young people who fall prey to ideologies. “*This is the problem of the reason behind terrorism and how it continues to grow. We have to stop these things called ticket to heavens or the chosen ones,*” he said.

The Libyan representative welcomed the presence of the panellists and praised the organizers for inviting distinguished personalities from the Arab region and the rest of the world stating: “*It is for me a great honour to be here today with those people like Mr. Al Brahimi, Mr. Tarek Mitri and the Congressman; it is*

something I never thought I could face in my life. It is for me a great honour actually to be here. Thanks to the organizers and thanks for giving time to speak.”

Protecting the rights of the Middle East Christians is a duty

Following the intervention of the Libyan representative, the moderator gave the floor to the **Permanent Representative of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan Ambassador Saja Majali**. Ambassador Majali underlined that Jordan *“constitutes a unique model of coexistence and fraternity between Muslims and Christians.”* She stressed that the Christians in Jordan are considered as one of the oldest Christian communities in the Middle East. They have played a key role in defending Jordan and in building the Jordanian society. Christians have also been the proponents of modern Arab nationalism. Throughout history, relations between Muslims and Christians in the Middle East have been characterized as brotherly and cordial. *“They have therefore been part and parcel of the Arab world’s past and present and will also be part of its future. They are not merely a by-product and they are not protected as minorities but guaranteed full and equal citizenship rights in every country in the region. This is how it should be,”* emphasized Ambassador Majali.

Despite these observations, the speaker stressed that the Middle East is undergoing a state of violence, sectarian tensions and ideological struggles in which violent and extremist groups are targeting the Christians of the Middle East. This situation is unacceptable, she said, *“under Islamic Law and morally as Arabs.”* Daesh and other extremist groups are inflicting horrors on the civilian populations in Iraq and Syria. Ambassador Majali noted: *“Our peaceful coexistence that has been the hallmark in Syria, in Iraq and in the region has dissipated. This evil necessitates the concerted efforts and the full cooperation of Muslims and Christians alike and everywhere.”*



Ambassador Saja Majali

In response to the current circumstances witnessed in the Middle East, Ambassador Majali stated that Jordan is taking concrete measures to address the

plight of the Arab Christians. His Majesty King Abdullah recently called for a major conference on the challenges faced by the Arab Christians that was held in Jordan's capital Amman. During this conference¹, it was stressed that protecting the rights of the Middle East Christians remains a duty rather than a favour as the Christians have played a key role in building Arab societies. Ambassador Majali echoed the views of King Abdullah emphasizing the importance of joining forces between Muslims and Christians to overcome challenges of mutual concern. In her concluding remarks, Ambassador Majali said:

“We need to propagate and amplify a discourse of mutual respect between Muslims and Christians, and Muslim-Christian dialogue that produces a tolerant discourse to mitigate religious tensions and bring about a culture of moderation, love, peace and full citizenship of all people residing in one country regardless of their religious and political faiths. This requires that we focus on education and numerous other initiatives and it requires we collectively pool our efforts to defeat Daesh on all fronts.”

Promoting the positive values of tolerance and coexistence



Ambassador Boudjemâa Delmi

Followed by Ambassador Majali's intervention, the **Permanent Representative of the People's Democratic Republic of Algeria Ambassador Boudjemâa Delmi** thanked the participants for their contributions and for transmitting the messages of tolerance and convergence between the Abrahamic religions. In relation to Ambassador Siljander's intervention, Ambassador Delmi requested the speaker to

give his point of view on how education, media and political leaders can all be part of the process of promoting the positive values of tolerance and coexistence. Ambassador Delmi underscored that educational systems and the negative role of media hinder the realization of these values.

In response to Ambassador Delmi's comments, Ambassador Siljander read Surah 5:48 of the Quran stating: *“He is testing you what he has revealed to you, so compete in doing good and you will return to God and he God will clarify the matters which you disagreed.”* Inspired by this Quranic chapter, Ambassador Siljander concluded: *“This is my hope that we, you and I together will help clarify with Allah's help the matters we once thought we disagreed on.”*

1. The conference held in Jordan's capital Amman was attended by the Executive Director of the Geneva Centre Ambassador Idriss Jazairy

V Concluding remarks

First step towards the holding of a World Conference

Ambassador Jazairy concluded the panel debate expressing the Geneva Centre's gratefulness for the participation of global opinion makers to identify convergences between Islam and Christianity that can be conducive to the advancement of equal and inclusive citizenship rights. It was underscored that the side event is a first step to identify a global approach on addressing issues related to religious minorities and to broaden the approach of addressing religious discrimination to include all minorities irrespective of religious beliefs, denominations and value systems. For these reasons, the present meeting is a concrete attempt to address the "*broader picture*" encompassing all religious minorities.



Ambassador Jazairy and Dr. Al Qassim

Finally, Ambassador Jazairy reminded the participants about the need to provide better protection against physical threats and to increase our efforts to address marginalization and discrimination of religious minorities. The result of this derives from the perennial "*international and internecine conflicts*" that have hit the Middle East giving rise to social collapse, social frustration and power vacuums which have been "*occupied by terrorist groups.*" Although a military solution will enable violent and extremist groups to lose their grip, it would not provide a long-term solution that would restore the social fabric and heal "*social scars.*" To achieve this, the Executive Director highlighted the importance of identifying commonalities between Islam and Christianity that could constitute the "*hard core of an effort*" to promote equal and inclusive citizenship rights worldwide. "*The Great Convergence between Christianity*

and Islam should help roll back the spread of phobic language encompassing off-the-peg ideologies rejecting the Other's faith," emphasized Ambassador Jazairy. He added that the present meeting could be a first step towards the organization of a world conference on *"Religions, Creeds and/or Other Value Systems: Joining Forces to Enhance Equal Citizenship Rights"* that would *"constitute the ultimate victory over violent extremism and subtler forms of discrimination"*. The moderator concluded by thanking all the speakers who had supported the idea of holding this world conference in 2018.

To wrap-up the panel discussion, the **Chairman of the Geneva Centre Dr. Al Qassim** thanked the panel members for their outstanding interventions and the audience for their active contributions. The Chairman said that it has been an honour and a privilege to listen and to learn from the deliberations that took place during the panel debate.

He also expressed the wish that the panel debate would be the first step *"towards achieving greater goals in the future."* *"At the end of the day"*, he said, *"we belong to the same family, the same humanity. We have no other planet to live in and to run away from this one."* The great religions of Christianity and Islam, he noted, share common values. If both religions join their forces, religious co-existence and inter-religious tolerance can reach a higher level.

DRAWING LESSONS FROM THE PANEL MEETING

Religion and beliefs, joining forces to enhance equal citizenship rights

Additional comments for a proposed world conference

I Introduction

In present times, we are witness to a sweeping rise in populism, xenophobia, including Islamophobia and other forms of religio-phobias, all undercut by a fear of those who are different, in regard to their religion, ethnicity, culture, geographical origin, colour of skin, and thus looked upon warily as strangers, whose presence is both, disturbing and threatening. The rise and spread of such attitudes is reinforced by the highly efficient modern means of mass communication through the press and social media.

Ironically, all three Abrahamic religions in fact challenge this deep-rooted fear of difference. This is anchored in their very conception of the relation of God with man. The Creator is infinitely different from His creatures yet, as St. Augustine once said, ‘closer to me than I am to myself’. The Qu’ran in turn says ‘closer to me than my jugular vein’. And the Bible states that ‘you shall love the stranger, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt’. Pope Francis himself reminded the international community from his pulpit in Cairo in April 2017 that *“History does not forgive those who talk about equality but then discard those who are different.”*

Furthermore, all religions vehemently disapprove justification, whether religious or otherwise, of violence, inhumane actions, terrorism and ill-treatment of human beings. Judaism observes ‘What is hateful to you do not do to your fellow man – this is the entire law, all the rest is commentary’. Inversely, as the Christian tradition upholds ‘all things ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them for this is the Law’. The Holy Qu’ran and the Prophet’s hadiths clearly spell out reciprocal human responsibilities in much the same vein, for when asked what is the rule of Islam, the Prophet replied ‘feed the hungry, give the greeting of peace both to those one knows and to those one does not know’.

II Current trends and events

Despite such principles deeply anchored in all the major world religions, current policies, trends and events are not just disturbing but highly alarming, giving cause for genuine anxiety and an urgent need for concerted efforts across continents and cultures, to find and implement universally accepted adequate and appropriate long-term solutions.

There exist some 20 million Muslims in Western Europe, flowing from the migratory movements of Muslims of various religious tendencies into Europe, from the start of the 19th century to the present day. The impetus for this migration came from colonisation, demographic pressures, the increasing demand for labour with the rapid and widening development of activities in industrialised states, and the quest for liberty and the hope of a better life. At the outset, this arrival was greeted by the European population largely with indifference, at times tinged with wariness and a limited degree of hostility.

This attitude underwent a dramatic change, first with the Iranian revolution of the late seventies and its legacy, then with the tragedies of 11 September 2001 and the bomb attacks on trains in Madrid on 11 March 2004, followed by the incident in London on 7 July 2005. These resulted in an abrupt and sharp increase in the hostility of Europe towards Islam and Muslims. The attacks continued and one could cite as prominent examples the attack on the French journal *Charlie Hebdo*'s headquarters, 7 January 2015, the multiple terror attacks in Paris on 13 November 2015, the Brussels airport and metro station bombings on 22 March 2016, the Nice Bastille day attack on 14 July 2016, the Berlin Christmas market attack on 19 December 2016, the London Westminster attack on 22 March 2017, the Stockholm terror attack on 4 April 2017, and the Manchester concert hall bombing on 22 May 2017.

Consequently, this hostility, directed against Muslims in general and Arabs in particular, has since reached a peak of xenophobia, discrimination and stigmatisation. In addition, the actions of a minority of radical Islamists contributed to the resurgence of the extreme right in Europe and to the re-emergence of fascism. Together, they accounted for a negative evolution of the nature of racism and the demagogic rhetoric of European extremists, representing a modern-day reflection of the nature of power in European history, characterised by reputed historians as a struggle between races and the domination of the northern peoples, and which today derives support from state-related and civil society institutions such as extremist parliamentary groups and youth organisations.

The following examples, far from exhaustive, of such trends and events, both in Europe and elsewhere, bear testimony to the above.

In Europe, roughly one million people have arrived in waves over recent years from Syria, Iraq, Afghanistan and elsewhere. This rapid influx has shaken European social structures, accelerated a rise in right-wing nationalism and saddled social welfare systems with the complex challenge of absorbing so many desperate wanderers at once. A stark example of this reality is the case of

the German town of Weimar (65,000 citizens) which absorbed nearly a thousand refugees in one year. Germany settled the migrants with remarkable efficiency and speed. But at the individual level where true and lasting integration takes place, there were strong cultural walls. As an elderly citizen of that town grimly observed, echoing the feeling of most of his compatriots, this refugee situation may turn into a social conflict.²

In France, the string of terrorist attacks that intensified two years ago in Paris has fed a current of national anxiety, and it has only grown worse with the recognition that hundreds of French citizens fighting alongside DAESH — more than those from any other European country — will be trickling homeward from Syria and Iraq, many of them to French prisons that are widely considered to be incubators for terror plots. This has led some analysts to ask whether such a phenomenon represents a criminalization of Islam or an ‘islamization’ of crime. Far right populist parties in Europe invoke Islam and globalization as two linked evils threatening France. A mainstream right-wing statesman published a book late last year titled *“Defeating Islamic Totalitarianism.”* Analysts suggest that France’s very identity is at stake. An elder statesman, in a recent book, wrote of the Paris attacks and their aftermath: *“Isn’t the essence of the matter that we don’t know today who we are or what we want to do?”*³

Diversity, instead of being considered an enrichment of society, has fostered a trend in Europe that seems to run in the opposite direction. A high school student in Denmark, born to a Danish mother and an Iranian father and brought up in the country, was denigrated by a far-right member of the Danish Parliament who declared that this is not how one becomes Danish. Indeed, such an attitude, denying the possibility of becoming Danish even down several generations, delivers a fatal blow to all attempts to foster integration of immigrants and of diverse faiths.⁴

In the USA, the FBI reported in November 2016 that attacks against American Muslims had surged in 2015, up nearly 67% over 2014. The data, which is the most comprehensive concerning hate crimes in the country, showed an alarming rise in some types of crimes tied to the 2016 presidential campaign and the terrorist attacks within the USA and abroad since 2015.⁵

2. Rick Lyman and Melissa Eddy, “Welcome to Weimar”, The New York Times (hereafter NYT), April 28, 2017.

3. Robert F. Worth, « The Professor and the Jihadi », NYT, April 5, 2017.

4. Ravinder Kaur, « Who says you’re a Dane? » NYT, October 17, 2016.

5. Eric Lichtblau, “Attacks on American Muslims fuel increase in Hate Crimes, FBI says”, NYT, November 15, 2016.

In Canada, Quebec, was founded a year and half ago a group called “*La Meute*” or Wolfpack, to stop the spread of what they called “*invasive political Islam.*” The group has surpassed 50,000, including due-paying members, to lend it financial muscle and political clout. These pockets of intolerance seem to be growing across the country in the face of Prime Minister Justin Trudeau’s policy to open Canada’s doors to refugees and present a face of tolerance and inclusion in a world increasingly hostile to immigration. “*La Meute*” believes there is a real threat that Islamists are bending Canada’s tolerant culture to their will and inject Shariah law in Canada. As Professor Barbara Perry of the University of Ontario observes, groups such as La Meute “are embedded in a broader cultural ethos that bestows *“permission to hate.”*”⁶

India, a country accounting for close to one-sixth of the world population, of which around 120 million Muslims (the third largest Muslim population in the world after those of Indonesia and Pakistan), is constitutionally a secular state with complete freedom of religion. Nonetheless, in practice, limits on free speech and attacks on religious minorities, often led by extremist or vigilante groups, are an increasing concern in the country. Hindu extremist groups such as the Shiv Sena and the Rashtriya Sevak Sanga (RSS) consider Muslims to be disloyal to the Indian state. This leads to discrimination and persecution directed against Muslims, compounded by the security forces’ abuses and lack of accountability. Indian law makes it extremely difficult to prosecute public officials and Section 197 of the Criminal Procedure Code bars courts from recognizing any offenses, except sexual, alleged to have been committed by public servants in the discharge of their official duties unless the central or state government permits prosecution. Since the nineteen seventies, the movement of Muslims to demand equal rights gathered momentum, and the polarization between Hindus and Muslims attained an apogee in the Shah Banoo case (1985) where the demand for a uniform civil code was met with outright resistance from Muslim fundamentalist groups.⁷ Thereafter, there followed several dramatic events, such as the destruction of the Babri masjid (mosque), Ayodhya, Uttar Pradesh, in 1992. Such events and incidents have continued since. Recently, a vigilante called “*Gau rakshak*” or cow protection groups, have recently carried out violent attacks on Muslims accused of slaughtering cows and eating beef,

6. Craig S. Smith, “In Canada, where Muslims are few, Group stirs Fear of Islamists”, *NYT*, April 15, 2017.

7. The case concerned an elderly Muslim woman who sued her divorced husband for maintenance and Muslim traditionalists saw the court ruling in her favour as interference in Islamic personal laws, although moderate Muslims welcomed it as progress towards equal treatment.

as cows are considered sacred in Hinduism.⁸ Despite their large population in India, Muslims are strikingly under-represented in the civil service, military and institutions of higher education. A report commissioned by the Congress government in 2006, the Justice Sachar Committee Report, clearly indicated certain levels and forms of systemic discrimination and official prejudice operating in Indian society at almost all levels against Muslims. With regard to the African immigrant community in India, the initial albeit fragile hospitality has gradually given way to a litany of intolerance, dubbing Africans as to be loud, exuberant and dirty, loose women, drug addicts and traffickers. Recent events, including violence against Africans, have awakened dormant prejudices aggravated by a tendency to prize fairer skin over dark.⁹ In a perceptive essay, an analyst warns of the dangers of Hindu nationalism that could bring under threat India's founding values of secularism and diversity. This danger flows from the two rival ideas that have shaped modern India: the plural nationalism originating in the struggle against British colonialism; and the current trend of muscular, majoritarian nationalism.¹⁰

In Egypt, the Christian community has long suffered persecution and continues to be the target of suicide bombers and Islamic extremists. In fact, Egypt has had a majority Christian population for nearly one thousand years before Islam became the dominant religion. Today, Coptic Christians represent 10% of the country's population or nearly 6 million. Shariah law became the principal source of legislation in the eighties, with persecution of Coptic Christians most prevalent in Upper Egypt. The spread of the Wahhabi interpretation of Islam fostered further discrimination, as it considers Copts non-believers and therefore not brethren of the Muslims and so not equal. With regard to the attacks against them, the security forces show a marked degree of apathy, promoting thereby a culture of impunity. On Palm Sunday April 9, 2017, DAESH claimed responsibility for explosions at two Coptic Christian Churches in Egypt that killed nearly 50 worshippers, creating panic and anxiety among this historically deep-rooted minority religious group in the country. In his official visit to Egypt that followed this tragic event, Pope Francis warned against wrapping violence and terror in the language of religion. In a powerful message delivered at Al Azhar mosque and university, he said: *"As religious leaders, we are called, therefore, to unmask the violence that masquerades as purported sanctity"*,

8. Suhasini Raj, « Hindu Cow Vigilantes in Rajasthan, India, beat Muslim to Death », NYT, April 5, 2017.

9. Nilanjana S. Roy, « A Racist Turn in India », NYT, January 24, 2017.

10. Vaibhav Sharma, « In 'Hinduvta or Hind Swaraj' a Warning against Hindu Nationalism », NYT, July 18, 2016.

adding “*We have an obligation to denounce violations of human dignity and human rights, to expose attempts to justify every form of hatred in the name of religion, and to condemn these attempts as idolatrous caricatures of God.*” In turn, the mosque’s Grand Imam Ahmad al-Tayeb urged the West not to hold an entire religion accountable for the crimes of any small group of self-proclaimed followers.¹¹

In Iraq and Syria, sectarianism has been exacerbated by foreign military operations. It has made their current conflicts all the more intractable. There are numerous similarities between the situation facing religious minorities in both countries, where Ba’thism, a particular doctrine of Arab nationalism, played a predominant role. With its demise, Arab and non-Arab ethnic minorities were increasingly threatened.

In Iraq, the major religious minorities are the Assyrian Christians, who speak their own language and do not identify as Arabs, the Kurds and the Yezidis, both speaking Kurdish yet considering themselves a distinct minority. Much of the structural discrimination against minorities is rooted in laws and policies that were promulgated during Saddam Hussein’s regime and have permeated government mechanisms and structures. His regime pursued suppressive policies towards Kurds, Shia-Muslims, Christians, Yezidis, Turkmen and Shabaks, provoking large-scale forced displacement. Post-Hussein civil conflict has made minorities even more vulnerable and impunity for attacks against them has been rampant. Thus, between 2003 and 2015, three-quarters of Iraq’s Christians were driven from their homes or killed. During the same period, the Sabeen-Mandean community in Iraq experienced over a hundred killings, kidnappings and attacks. With the advent of DAESH, the Yezidis suffered worse persecution. The men were offered conversion or death, the women conversion and subsequent marriage to DAESH terrorists or be sold as slaves in accordance with the DAESH masquerades of sharia rules on enemy females and children captured in war. In the Sinjar province thousands of Yezidi men, women and children were killed, beaten, raped, abducted and sold as sex slaves. The offensive against the Yezidis is so systematic and large-scale that in February 2016 the European Parliament called upon the UN to refer DAESH abuses against civilians to the International Criminal Court and for DAESH abuses against religious minorities to be considered as genocide.

Syria’s descent into a full-fledged civil war since 2012 has been particularly harsh for its religious minorities. By 2014, the level of ‘religious hostilities’ in

11. Jason Horowitz, “Pope Francis, in Egypt, Delivers a Blunt Message on Violence and Religion”, *NYT*, April 29, 2017.

Syria had steeply risen. In several areas, members of religious minorities have been forced to choose sides and those that do not are subjected to pressure, allegations of collusion and violent attacks. Large numbers of Christians, Ismailis and Yezidis have fled Syria and sought refuge in neighbouring countries. The outflow of Syrian migrants was increased as a result of Western sanctions against Syria. This deprived the formerly thriving social industry and crafts of inputs and outlets, causing extensive unemployment in the middle classes. In both countries, tensions and misunderstandings between communities are rife, fostering discrimination, compounded by democratic governance deficits, structural discrimination and cultures of impunity.¹²

Within the Muslim community itself, the Sunni-Shia divide has become a devastating threat over the recent decades, leading to continuous bloodshed, conventional wars and terrorism, borne out by the Iran-Iraq war, the Taliban in Afghanistan and Pakistan, the conflict in Yemen involving Houthi opposition to the constitutional government, the numbingly regular suicide bombings in Iraq, Syria and Pakistan. One could also add the massacre of innocents, including fellow-Muslims, by terrorist groups proclaiming allegiance to Islam, such as DAESH, Al-Qaeda even fighting as Jubhat an Nusra in Syria with Western weapons, and Boko Haram.

In Indonesia in recent years, cracks have been appearing in Indonesia's pluralist fabric, as hard-line Islamic groups that were once at the margin of national politics exert increasing influence. As Ms. Sinta Nuriyah, wife of former Indonesian president Abdurrahman Wahid and a nationally recognized figure for promoting tolerance in Islam and defending the rights of marginalized groups and women observes, *"We live among different religions, ethnicities and cultures. It's necessary that we stand up to extremists."*¹³

In Myanmar, the Rohingyas, a Muslim minority marginalized since decades by the State authorities, are being subjected to violence even by extremist Buddhists, forcing tens of thousands to flee the country, at which rate the on-going persecutions could result in an 'ethnic cleansing' of the country's territory in due time. As a Western human rights NGO has documented, the exactions committed by the authorities are wide-ranging: forced sterilization, refusal to provide medical care, destruction of villages, installation in detention camps,

12. "The Protection Needs of Minorities from Syria and Iraq", Report, World Council of Churches, November 2016.

13. Jon Emont, "A Former First Lady presses on for a Tolerant, Feminist Islam", NYT, April 7, 2017.

slavery, systematic rape and sexual torture, arbitrary arrests.¹⁴

Buddhist minorities continue to be persecuted in several Asian countries. In India, Buddhists account for some 7 million individuals, the majority of which are Hindu outcastes or untouchables, converted to escape caste Hindu discrimination and persecution. Hinduism's hostility towards Buddhism was a major reason for the decline of Buddhism in India, the place of its birth. The Government of Myanmar has attempted to control Buddhist institutions through coercive means, including the intimidation, torture and murder of monks.¹⁵ In Sri Lanka, during the civil war, Buddhists were the object of many terrorist attacks perpetrated by the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE). The sacred Bo tree, under which the Buddha attained Enlightenment, was attacked and 300 pilgrims killed.¹⁶ According to a major Western NGO, Buddhists as well as followers of other religions are also said to suffer in Vietnam. The leaders of the Unified Buddhist Congregation of Vietnam have been imprisoned for decades.¹⁷

III Major Issues and Concerns

The major issues confronting the world community in the domain under consideration are manifold and the related challenges daunting.

These issues and challenges comprise, among others, anti-migrant sentiment, discrimination and violence both verbal and physical, xenophobia flowing principally from religious, ethnic and cultural differences, terrorism and the resulting Islamophobia. These social ills are compounded by the continuing existence of multiple armed conflicts. As a result, people on the move, whether within or across national borders, have reached the numbers of 65 million¹⁸ which is unprecedented. Manipulation of mass communication, through press and social media, has become standard fare. There is a dearth of coping mechanisms to address such challenges. One can also regret the absence of political will or weakness of State institutions to adequately implement existing international legal norms and universally accepted resolutions in international forums.

Against this backdrop, the fundamental question of how to enhance equal citizenship rights is undoubtedly of crucial importance and perhaps the key to

14. "Tout ce que vous pouvez faire, c'est prier. Crimes contre l'humanité et nettoyage ethnique dans l'Etat birman d'Arakan," rapport de Human Rights Watch, New York, 2013.

15. Natasha Isla (ed.), "Burma: A Land where Buddhist Monks are Disrobed and Detained in Dungeons", November 2004.

16. "Encyclopaedia of Buddhism: Persecutions", p. 640.

17. "Vietnam: Religious Freedom Denied", Human Rights Watch, New York, May 8, 2008.

18. "Un monde de camps", Le Monde Diplomatique, mai 2017.

moving universally towards social cohesion, which in turn would guarantee social peace, security and balanced and sustainable development for all peoples and societies.

Article 7 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights stipulates: “*All are equal before the law and are entitled without any discrimination to equal protection of the law.*” This implies that the very base of equal citizenship rights is non-discrimination, equal treatment of all citizens implemented through legislation that guarantees every citizen equal rights in all spheres of society. Therefore, citizenship becomes the criterion of equal participation possibilities in the management of society as a whole and its protection a key tool for identity, inclusiveness and solidarity.

In order to strengthen equal citizenship rights, it is essential that members of all minorities, be they religious, ethnic, cultural or other, fully participate in the activity and decision making processes at local and national levels, so as to avoid becoming a sub-group and thus being marginalized, giving rise to discrimination in its myriad forms, jeopardizing social harmony.

However, as observed in the previous section of this review, current events and trends are running, unfortunately, in quite the opposite direction. Across the world today, Muslims, Christians and affiliates of other religions or beliefs, when not mainstream in a particular country, experience intolerance, hatred, discrimination and persecution. According to the Pew Research Centre, over 75% of the world’s population lives in areas with severe religious restrictions. Over 50% of all countries have some limitation or restriction placed upon religious minorities; in 25% some or all religious minorities are illegal and in 24% of cases, countries have placed restrictions on building, leasing, or repairing places of worship. Because some of the most restrictive countries are very populous, more than 5 billion people are living in countries with high government restrictions on religion or high social hostilities involving religion, the brunt of which often falls on religious minorities.¹⁹

This state of affairs incites a series of complex and sensitive questions such as : Are human rights truly universal or culturally relative? Do communal rights have primacy over individual rights? Do authorities have leeway or justification in introducing conditionality in the observance of human rights? What role for civil society institutions and religious leaders?

19. Statistics and observations drawn respectively from the dataset collected since 1990 by the Religion and State-Minorities (ARDA Project): <http://www.thearda.com/ras/> and the Pew Forum.

IV Legal Instruments and Normative Frameworks: An Overview²⁰

Ever since the creation of nation States in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, efforts were undertaken by minority groups to safeguard their religious, cultural or ethnic differences. The League of Nation, which adopted several so-called minority treaties, set the precedent for international legal recognition and protection of minority rights. The creation of the United Nations saw the gradual development of several norms, procedures and mechanisms regarding minorities. Among these, the fundamental instruments are the 1966 International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights²¹ and the 1992 Declaration on the Rights of Persons Belonging to National or Ethnic, Religious and Linguistic Minorities (referred to as the UN Minorities Declaration). Others include the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (whose article 2(2) enshrines the principle of non-discrimination in every respect), the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination, the Convention on the Rights of the Child, the ILO Discrimination (Employment and Occupation) Convention, 1958, international humanitarian law treaties, notably the Geneva Conventions, 1949.

It would be useful at this stage to refer to a widely recognized definition of what constitutes a minority, offered in 1977 by Francesco Capotorti, Special Rapporteur of the United Nations Sub-Commission on Prevention of Discrimination and Protection of Minorities. According to this definition a minority is:

“A group numerically inferior to the rest of the population of a State, in a non-dominant position, whose members – being nationals of the State – possess ethnic, religious or linguistic characteristics differing from those of the rest of the population and show, if only implicitly, a sense of solidarity, directed towards preserving their culture, traditions, religion or language.”²²

Beyond the aforementioned legal instruments, further developments took place in various international forums reaffirming the principle of non-discrimination, the rights of minorities and condemning xenophobia and religious hatred in

20. The legal references in this section are drawn from the publication “Minority Rights: International Standards and Guidance for Implementation”, United Nations, HR/PUB/10/3, 2010.

21. In particular Article 27 which states that: In those States in which ethnic, religious or linguistic minorities exist, persons belonging to such minorities shall not be denied the right, in community with the other members of their group, to enjoy their own culture, to profess and practice their own religion, or to use their own language.

22. E/CN.4/Sub.2/384/Rev.1, para.568.

general and the rising islamophobia in particular. The 2001 Durban Declaration and Programme of Action of the World Conference against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance provides an innovative anti-discrimination agenda and affirms that “*the ethnic, cultural, linguistic and religious identity of minorities, where they exist, must be protected and that persons belonging to such minorities should be treated equally and enjoy their human rights and fundamental freedoms without discrimination of any kind*” (para.66).

The covenants and treaties which embody Human Rights establish a cardinal rule that obliges even States which are not signatories to them to impose penalties on propaganda in favour of hostility or violence or incitement to racial or religious hatred (Article 20 Paragraph 2 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political rights). This might at times appear to be undermined by Article 19 of the same document which guarantees freedom of expression as the foundation of any democracy. However, there is ample evidence, based on legal doctrine, state practice, rulings by the UN Council for Human Rights and the UN Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, to sustain the view that Article 20 is henceforth part of international customary law from which no state can opt out. Legal rulings are particularly consistent in rejecting the fallacious argument based on the freedom of expression when this is cited in support of instances of religious hatred. The European Court of Human Rights, in *Norwood v. the UK*, where the applicant was attempting to invoke his right to freedom of expression in displaying a poster which constituted according to the Court a “*public expression of attack on all Muslims in the United Kingdom,*” ruled in its judgement, “*Such a general, vehement attack against a religious group, linking the group as a whole with a grave act of terrorism, is incompatible with the values proclaimed and guaranteed by the Convention, notably tolerance, social peace and non-discrimination.*” The application was unanimously declared inadmissible.

Well established in conventional law, the concept of incitement to racial and religious hatred and its prohibition also fulfills certain principles of customary law, including consistent state practice and the accompanying conviction that such practice has a legally obligatory status (*opinio juris*). There is evidence from internal laws within States, national as well as international rulings and from practices, which implies the existence of a generally accepted principle, including actions undertaken, habitual abstentions from action and expressions of opinion that are generally condemned, regarding the prohibition of incitement to racial and religious hatred.

V Development of religio-phobia

Different creeds and religions are under attack, to serve the interests of powers that be. For instance, under Communism, Christianity was seen as an obstacle to the implementation of communism and referred to as “*the opium of the people*.” In the Middle East, terrorist groups considered Christians as legitimate targets. Today, the Western world is developing Islamophobia, as observed in the initial section of this review.

Islamophobia and international law

Islamophobia, which basically indicates a collective fear of the religion of Islam, has mutated over time into a more precise socio-juridical concept that is characterized by hostility or hatred with regard to Muslims in general. This hatred is translated by certain pejorative views of Islam, such as: Islam as inferior to Western culture, barbaric, irrational, primitive and sexist; Islam as violent, aggressive, threatening and supportive of terrorism. This results into trivializing hostility towards Islam, justifying discriminatory practices towards Muslims and excluding them from mainstream society.

Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC)’s struggle against Islamophobia

This struggle is one of OIC’s basic concerns, embodied in Chapter 7 of its Ten year programme promulgated in 2005, exhorting Member States, among others, to emphasize the responsibility of the international community, including all governments, to ensure respect for all religions and combat their defamation; and, to initiate a structured and sustained dialogue in order to project the true values of Islam and empower Muslim countries to help in the war against extremism and terrorism.

Council of Europe

The Council of Europe’s Parliamentary Assembly (PACE) adopted resolution 1510 in 2006, which notes that “*hate speech against any religious group is not compatible with the fundamental rights and freedoms guaranteed by the European Convention on Human Rights and the case law of the European Court of Human Rights*.” Later, in 2010, the Resolution “*Islam, Islamism and Islamophobia in Europe*” adopted by PACE affords ratification and support to the various regional efforts undertaken by the OIC by placing the condemnation of Islamophobia in the privileged category referred to by jurists as law that is in the process of ongoing development.

In the preparatory introduction to this resolution, the Rapporteur, Mogens Jensen, noted that “*Article 9 of the European Convention on Human Rights guarantees*

freedom of thought, conscience and religion, including the right to manifest one's religion or belief, either alone or in community with others, in public or in private, in worship, teaching, practice and observance. Article 10 of the ECHR enshrines freedom of expression, including the right to express religious or philosophical views or oppose and criticize them." He then underlined that *"Both freedoms constitute the necessary requirements for a democratic society but must not be abused for the destruction or undue limitation of any of the rights and freedoms set forth in the ECHR."*

The UN

Within the UN, the prevailing view appears to be that people in general are not born intolerant but become so. In this light, the former UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan identified, in 2004, *"the measures to take in order effectively to counter Islamophobia: attempt to limit the influence of the media, which have the effect of spreading hatred, promote laws against it; act to further education, leadership, integration between communities and dialogue between faiths; increase understanding of the political context of the violence perpetrated in the name of religion."*

In June 2015 in the Human Rights Council, following the presentation of a report prepared by Mutuma Ruteere, Special Rapporteur on contemporary forms of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance, the attention of the Council members, as represented in the account of the subsequent discussions, was focused on *"the rise in power of the rhetoric of hatred disseminated by political groups, including Islamophobic, negro-phobic and neo-Nazi tendencies which are manifested especially in the United States and the countries of Europe."*

The European Union's representative made it clear that racism and ethnic discrimination were forbidden by the European Convention on Human Rights as well as by other agreements. European legislation banned incitement to hatred, racism and xenophobic violence. All this conveyed the clear implication that from the legal standpoint, Islamophobia has no place in Europe.

The concept of "Religious Defamation" as seen by the OIC and the UN

The States members of the OIC introduced the idea of religious defamation to the UN General Assembly in the following terms: *"We strongly believe that the defamation of Islam geared towards denigrating and dehumanizing Muslims, their beliefs and sacred personalities, insults the deep-seated religious feelings, undermines their dignity and violates their fundamental human rights thus*

threatening the multicultural fabric of societies... (and posing) grave and multidimensional challenges to global as well as regional peace, security and stability.”

Despite the adoption of a series of resolutions on the issue in the UN General Assembly and the Human Rights Council, with broad support from Western countries, the latter have placed increasing obstacles in the way of the psychological acceptance of the existence of an *opinio juris* within the body of the international community. Consequently, it would be difficult to claim the existence of any universally accepted customary position regarding the defamation of religion. In this case, regional or local customary practice, linking a group of states, needs to be the point of reference. From 2010 onwards, following an international consultation undertaken by Professor Ekmeleddin Ihsanoglu in Istanbul, (the so-called “*Istanbul Process*”), the OIC has adopted a twin-track strategy. This consists on the one hand of abandoning reference to the defamation of religion in favour of the consensual notion of the fight against intolerance and stigmatization based on religion or conviction, and on the other pursuing, within the framework of the Istanbul Process, a dialogue with the western countries regarding the struggle against confessional racism and Islamophobia.

In his address to the 15th session of the UN Human Rights Council in Geneva in September 2010, the OIC Secretary-General Ekmeleddin Ihsanoglu stressed eight points, of which three demand attention to the extent that they have rapidly been adopted by the western group of states and in particular the then US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton. These points invite States to prioritize the following actions: speak out against intolerance and religious hatred constituting an incitement to discrimination, hostility or violence; adopt measures to criminalize incitement to imminent violence based on religion; underscore the need to combat denigration, negative religious stereotyping and incitement to religious hatred.

The OIC’s two-track strategy and the above proposals were reflected in the wording of Resolution 16/18, adopted by consensus at the 16th session of the UN Human Rights Council in Geneva in March 2011. This resolution reaffirmed the entire judicial corpus embodied in the International Convention on Civil and Political Rights including its Articles 19 and 20. It provided in detail for various concrete measures to be taken at the national and international levels that were on the one hand intended to satisfy the preoccupations of the West regarding freedom of opinion, expression and religion, and on the other hand to satisfy the Muslim countries and the states of the South with the onerous

criminalization of racial and religious hatred and discrimination.

The resolution represented a compromise between the confirmation of existing law that the North was unwilling to go beyond and the juridical concepts related to the prohibition of incitement to racial and religious hatred, including Islamophobia, that the OIC was keen to emphasize.

VI Difficulties and Challenges

However, all these rights, resolutions and declarations are far from being realized.

The promotion and protection of the rights of minorities require particular attention to be paid to issues such as the recognition of minorities' existence; efforts to guarantee their rights to non-discrimination and equality; the promotion of multicultural and intercultural education, nationally and locally; the promotion of their participation in all aspects of public life; the inclusion of their concerns in development and poverty-reduction processes; disparities in social indicators such as employment, health and housing; the situation of women and the special concerns of children belonging to minorities.

Addressing these challenges would require, as a pre-requisite, a thorough analysis that would need to include some of the following aspects. To summarize:

Does there exist some form of organization of minority groups in a given context, and if so, do all members of such minorities have equal access to such structures?

Is there space for an open, unfettered dialogue between minorities and governmental bodies, at the local and national levels?

Are there mechanisms for reliable data collection with regard to respect for minority rights?

What are the gaps in terms of legal and policy frameworks?

Is there information about the discrimination and violence to which minorities are subject?

What, if any, are the programmes and actions that are, or need to be put, in place to create favourable conditions to enable members of minority groups to adequately express their characteristics and develop their culture, religion, language, traditions and customs?

Has the State adopted comprehensive legal provisions and legislation on non-discrimination and is their implementation effective?

Is there recognition and respect for the right to profess and practice religion and without discrimination from the State or others. Is the right to manifest one's religion or belief in public fully recognized?

Do there exist adequate redress mechanisms?

Do the State authorities encourage interfaith and inter-religious dialogue at all levels, and how do they address communal and sectarian tensions?

Is there a national policy of promotion and participation of minorities in public life, including in public services and parliament?

Are there adequate guarantees to ensure access of minorities to basic social services?

Do minorities have equal access to employment and income-generating activities?

What prospects are there to enable citizens to obtain full recognition of the equality of citizenship rights simply as citizens without having to fall back on resorting to the sub-identity defined by a shared religion or belief to enhance protection?

Minority women

The unfortunate universal gender discrimination is compounded with regard to women belonging to minorities by their uniquely disadvantaged position in society precisely as members of national, racial, ethnic, religious or linguistic minorities. They experience multiple and intersectional forms of discrimination based on both their minority status and their gender, making them particularly vulnerable to violations of their rights in public and private life.

Consequently, minority women often find themselves marginalized and excluded from their own communities as well as from society at large. They have limited opportunities for education, political participation, employment, income-generating opportunities, basic social services and may face additional challenges with regard to property rights. Their children can be more vulnerable to abuse, trafficking and other forms of exploitation, and suffer from discriminatory access to education, social and health services. The preference that mothers give to boys may actually perpetuate gender imbalances.

VII Ways Forward

The several side events and panel discussions organized lately by the Geneva Centre²³, with their rich panel interventions and ensuing discussions, offer interesting possibilities to move forward.

Thus, it is primarily the responsibility of States not only to implement the international legal instruments they have ratified, but also to create the national legislation on which a real equality in citizenship rights is guaranteed. In practice, national authorities, including political parties, need to foster participation, tolerance and dialogue viewing difference as a source of welcome diversity and resilience in a globalised world.

United Arab Emirates (UAE) offers an excellent example. It has created the world's first ministerial post for tolerance. This has been instrumental in leading various initiatives, such as establishing the National Programme for Tolerance through which the UAE society will continue to build up tolerance and nurture the culture of acceptance of the other.

The police and security forces could be instructed to contribute increasingly to upholding the respect for universal human rights and to ensuring the overall protection of the civilian population, irrespective of religions and/or beliefs, as much from terrorist attacks as from xenophobia, incitement to hatred and violence based on religious and racial discrimination. All States would be invited to include reports on their annual action plan in this respect every 4 years in the context of the Universal Periodic Review of their country.

An important pillar of all such efforts would consist of steps to overturn the prevailing socio-economic marginalization of minority groups. Various means could be envisaged in different domains: promoting employment, through training and other measures such as ensuring a minimum access to employment opportunities, concerning unemployed youth in particular; promoting accessible housing for the poor and for the disabled; ensuring access to education, public health services and justice, as a basic right.

Religious leaders of all communities also have a crucial role to play. They need to develop new approaches in their religious education, taking into account the diversity of cultures of the people they address, providing insights into the authentic meanings of the Scriptures, traditions and their meanings, advocating openness and plurality of approach towards other faiths, promoting

23. Notably on “Muslims in Europe: The Road to Social Harmony”, Geneva, 19 September 2016, and “Islam and Christianity: The Great Convergence – Working jointly towards equal citizenship rights”, Geneva, 15 March 2017.

fundamental messages of peace and social harmony, philosophical rather than conflict-oriented dialogue, inducing greater interaction with civil society. Nor should social integration in this context be taken to mean assimilation. No durable peace or harmony, no pursuit of human commonality can be predicated on the obliteration of some key aspects of specific component of identities such as cultural background as shaped by religion or belief. This can only generate social disability, not social empowerment. Such is the underlying message of Article 18 of the Universal Declaration on Human Rights.

With regard to the role of religious leaders in particular, it is worthwhile citing a very interesting initiative, namely the 2016 Conference in Morocco on protecting the legal rights of religious minorities living in Muslim-majority countries. Attended by over 300 muftis, theologians and scholars, it produced a Final Document, the Marrakesh Declaration, which calls for Muslim countries to tolerate and protect religious minorities living within their borders – among them Christians, Jews, Hindus and Bahais as well as Yazidis and Sabians. The conference cited the Charter of Medina established by the Prophet, which enshrines the idea of common citizenship regardless of religious belief and based on fundamental principles such as freedom of movement, property ownership, mutual solidarity and defense including consideration for public order, as well as those of justice and equality before the law.²⁴

The same year, the fourth summit in a series of encounters between Christian (Catholic and Anglican/Episcopal) and Muslim (Sunni and Shia) religious leaders and scholars from four continents, with the presence of representatives of the Armenian Orthodox Church and of the Jewish and Zoroastrian religious traditions, was held in Teheran, Iran. The theme was “*Respect for Human Dignity – The Foundation of Peace and Security*.” The final document of the summit stated, among others, that the concepts of believer/non-believer (Mumin/Kafir) should not affect citizens’ rights and social relationships; that the books are sometimes misinterpreted, instrumentalised and distorted to justify and facilitate acts of hatred, discrimination, exclusion, violence and terrorism towards others; women, children, religious and ethnic minorities are the first targets of an erroneous interpretation of the texts; and that we should not allow any ideological interpretation or manipulation of the true meaning of all religious texts to override our concern for just, equal, fair and compassionate treatment of all human beings.²⁵

24. “Marrakesh Declaration on the Rights of Religious Minorities in Predominantly Muslim Majority Countries”, Marrakesh, Morocco, January 27, 2016.

25. “Call to Action”, Fourth Session of Christian-Muslim Summit, Teheran, Iran, November 9, 2016.

Open-minded Islamic groups could also play a pivotal role. An excellent example is offered by a very promising and pioneering development in Indonesia, the world's most populous Muslim-majority nation. The youth wing of Nahdlatul Ulama, the largest mass Islamic organization in the world, is pressing governments, both individually and through the United Nations, to draw from Islamic law its hidden potential to adapt to 21st century norms. It seeks to interpret Islamic law in ways that conform to modern norms. Among other aspects, it calls for up-dating and fine-tuning elements of Islamic law on relations between Muslims and non-Muslims, the structure of government and the proper aims and conduct of warfare (as opposed to terrorism, torture, abductions and killings of civilians).²⁶

There is an acute need to include representatives of the mass media in the process of promoting social cohesion and harmony. Their outreach is indispensable to furthering appropriate and understandable messages that would contribute to reducing social tensions and misunderstandings concerning diversity. A separate approach needs to be developed towards social media. The rise of extremism and populism in the MENA region and on both sides of the Northern Atlantic are now incontrovertible realities. These woeful trends result from the States distancing themselves from their people. The hall-mark of this emerging trend is unrestrained hate-speech on the Internet and the replacement of arguments by images appealing not to reason but to emotions and which can convey poisonous messages spread at the speed of light. This appears like a tendency to move away from the gains of the Age of Enlightenment and a return to rudimentary, emotional communication through reductionist images. Social media, in and as of themselves, have indeed been a breakthrough in terms of freedom of opinion and of expression. Yet they can, in the context of anonymity, become a liability for social harmony. As the founder of contemporary Algeria, the Emir Abdel Qader El Jazairy said after visiting a printing press in Paris in the XIXth century: *"What comes out of it is likened to a drop of water coming from the sky: if it falls into the half open shell, it produces the pearl; if it falls in the mouth of the viper, it produces venom."* It is therefore urgent to devise an ad hoc policy at the UN level to plug what could be an ominous protection gap for minorities. An obvious solution would consist at least in adopting at the UN level the equivalent of the Council of Europe Additional Protocol dealing with hate-speech committed on-line, to the Convention on Cybercrime (also referred to as the Budapest Convention).

26. Joe Cochrane, "Indonesians Seek to Export a Modernized Vision of Islam", *NYT*, May 1, 2017.

In an innovative approach, the Permanent Representative of Oman suggested during the 19 September 2016 panel discussion organized by the Geneva Centre that a concerted effort be undertaken by the Permanent Missions of Arab countries in Geneva to encourage, facilitate and support the holding of women's art and handicraft exhibitions, fashion shows, music concerts, ensuring wide media coverage. This would strikingly offset western perceptions of an alleged low status of women in Islamic societies. It would furthermore contribute to the creation of an open space for dialogue and lead to a serene understanding of true Islam, a word pregnant of the concept of "*salam*" meaning "*peace*." For, among Islam's fundamental values figure tolerance, respect and equity. The Geneva example could then be emulated by Embassies of Arab countries in other European capitals and cities.

All of the above efforts require the support of the authorities and of the different segments of the international community at large, a support which needs to be harnessed in a coherent, systematic and efficient manner.

There also exist many initiatives, undertaken by groups, NGOs, IGOs, civil society as well as scholars, all directly or indirectly discussing and trying to address the issue of equal citizenship rights. The Geneva Centre could be usefully entrusted with the task of undertaking an exhaustive compilation of all such initiatives, in preparation for a proposed World Conference devoted to the theme of equal citizenship rights.

VIII The World Conference: Agenda, Objectives and Outcomes

The World Conference will build on the discussions initiated in the side event: "*Islam and Christianity: The Great Convergence - Working jointly towards equal citizenship rights*" that was held on 15 March 2017 at the United Nations Office in Geneva.

The purpose of this conference would be to elaborate a more inclusive understanding and forward-looking discussion of equal citizenship that includes religious pluralism. Citizenship is a historically contested and continually evolving concept. In its basic conception, it refers to a type of membership, to a group of people. Models of citizenship identify various conceptual relationships between individuals and societies that lay the ground for debates surrounding equal citizenship. This can take form through the processes of social consensus, integration and/or community-building, to name but a few, that require further discussion to identify a model of citizenship that is compatible with diversity and respect of human rights of all people irrespective of religious faiths and denominations.

The concept of minority itself relies on the definition that a part of the population is distinct from the rest of the population owing to objective factors encompassing national, ethnic, cultural, religious and all linguistic identities. This concept also entails a subjective element in which minorities recognize and themselves accept that they constitute a minority within a society²⁷. As a result of these elements, minorities become reduced to a sub-group and a natural target of discrimination and marginalization by the majority population of a society. In turn, this hinders the realization of social harmony impacting adversely the prospects of diversity. In a nutshell minorities, especially the most vulnerable, are the product of a social genesis of marginalization, discrimination and exclusion of sub-groups, such as women and girls, especially from indigenous background, and youth to name but a few of relevant sub-groups.

For the purpose of the draft agenda of the conference, the term minority will be applied for pragmatic purposes to highlight the international commitments to the protection of vulnerable components, which are somewhat, inadequately, referred to as minorities.

People take refuge in the sub-identity of a minority because they are not satisfied that the national State will protect their citizenship rights as it does for others. So if and when equal citizenship rights are effectively upheld by the State for all, the very concept of “*minority as a refuge*” is replaced by that of the “*celebrated diversity of social components*.”

To foster and strengthen equal citizenship rights, social components encompassing people sharing the same religion or creed in a particular country need to be equally empowered, to enable them to participate in the social development of their national community. The underlying premise of such societies is respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms, including cultural and religious diversity, human dignity, social justice, gender equality and educational and employment opportunities. The different social components of any community, whether related to religious affiliation, or to other features of diversity, must be empowered to enable communities to participate on the basis of equality, and not just equity, with the aim of promoting inclusive societies and social cohesion. In turn, this would unleash the full potential of diversity.

Furthermore, flowing from the historical fact that Christianity and Islam share a common Abrahamic heritage, the proposed conference would seek to capitalize

27. OHCHR 2010. “*Minority Rights: International Standards and Guidance for Implementation*.” See page 2. Online. URL: http://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Publications/MinorityRights_en.pdf (Available at 04.03.2017)

on the convergence between these two religions in particular and beyond, so as to mitigate marginalization of all minorities world-wide, particularly faith-based discrimination, xenophobia and consequent violence, with the aim of building a culture of peace, tolerance and inter-cultural dialogue. The reasons for focusing on religious minorities arise from the fact that there is a broad attempt across the world to distort religion through extremism and fundamentalism to conjure up divine reasons for conflicts and irreconcilable opposition of main civilizations despite the fact that they have contributed, since time immemorial, to welfare, progress and prosperity. As His Holiness the Pope asserted on 28 April 2017 in Cairo, *“We have an obligation to denounce violations of human dignity and human rights, to expose attempts to justify every form of hatred in the name of religion, and to condemn these attempts as idolatrous caricatures of God.”*

Lastly, the World Conference would provide an opportunity for participants to share information, experiences, expertise, best practices and a practical to-do-list on promoting peaceful and inclusive societies through equal citizenship and fostering respect for religious freedom.

Format:

Opening remarks by the Chair

Designation of the conference rapporteurs related to:

- Diversity;
- Minority issues;

Social components related to the protection and promotion of minority rights.

Final observations will be presented by the designated panel members.

Concluding remarks will be shared by the chair at the end of the conference.

Target Groups:

The conference aims to target relevant stakeholders addressing religious intolerance and advocating for peaceful and inclusive societies. The following groups will be targeted:

- Governments;
- Religious leaders;
- Diplomatic missions in Geneva;
- IGOs;

- UN agencies;
- NGOs;
- Think tanks;
- Academics.

Objectives:

- Challenge prevailing misunderstandings and misconceptions between Muslims and Christians based on human rights principles;
- Analyse current mechanisms related to the promotion, protection and implementation of minority rights, and identify areas of improvement;
- Outline factors responsible for marginalization of religious minorities and its consequences, and why international instruments and mechanisms on minority rights hinder the realization of equality in citizenship rights;
- Identify bedrock principles between Abrahamic religions enshrined in human rights;
- Identify commonalities for action through the upgrade of identified bedrock principles;
- Highlight proposals on achieving pragmatic solutions for promoting equal citizenship rights with regard to faith-based minorities, and sub-groups such as women and girls, especially from indigenous background, as well as youth in all regions of the world;
- Outline recommendations, including identification of collective responsibilities, follow-up actions and mechanisms.

Outcomes:

The World Conference aims to provide the following outcomes:

- Analyse the current framework of minority rights and identify measures to influence policy-change in favour of promoting and strengthening minority rights;
- Identify models of equal citizenship rights focused on fostering social cohesion and the securing of equal civil, political, social, cultural and economic rights;
- Produce a written report that reflects the discussions, conclusions and recommendations for follow-up.

VIII Preparation and Organization of the World Conference

This would require meticulous preparation, for which the Geneva Centre needs to be accorded appropriate resources.

A preliminary step would be for the Geneva Centre, the European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI, Council of Europe) and the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, to constitute a group of experts. The group could also include one or two governmental or regional representatives from each of the five regions (WEOG, Africa, Eastern Europe, Asia, Latin America), one each from the African Union, the OIC, the European Union and the Council of Europe.

A Steering Committee would need to be established, which could include *inter alia* the Secretary-General of the World Council of Churches, former Algerian Foreign Minister Lakhdar Brahimi, a High Representative of the Vatican, the Grand Imam Ahmad al-Tayeb of Al-Azhar mosque and university and others. The Executive Director of the Geneva Centre would service the Steering Group with the necessary support staff.

ANNEX I
FULL STATEMENTS OF PARTICIPANTS

Video message

His Royal Highness Prince Hassan bin Talal

Member of the Royal Family of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan

Dear friends, distinguished participants,

The peace of God in the world, as it was put in the Brussels Declaration, is essentially what we seek when we speak about the participation of human capital: it is not only the peace of God, but it is also the peace of God's children that we attempt to build, by speaking of a "levelling", that is to say, of universal citizenship with universal values shared by all. Let us look at those values for a moment.

The fundamental common element about monotheistic religions is faith and confidence in the good, human-loving, compassionate, and merciful God. All of our religions, Judaism, Christianity, Islam consider justice and peace as gifts and blessings from God. All of our religions disapprove of religious justification of violence and inhumane actions, none of them approve of violence, terrorism or ill treatment of human beings. The Brussels Declaration unfortunately has not been heeded and that is why we are meeting here today, to say once again, in the spirit of Judaism, *"What is hateful to you do not do to your fellow man – this is the entire law, all the rest is commentary."* Christianity has the tradition of *"all things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them for this is the law of the Prophet."*

In this context I would like to emphasize the importance of Islam as the third and youngest of the Abrahamic family of faiths, embodying ethical codes to which both Jews and Christians and likewise subscribe in spirit. The Holy Qur'an and the Prophet's hadiths are clear in the regulation of human relations and reciprocal responsibilities. When asked, the Holy Prophet is quoted in saying *"What is the rule of Islam? What is the best thing in Islam? And the answer was: to feed the hungry, to give the greeting of peace both to those one knows and to those one does not know."*

Why are we going to emphasize the levelling of citizenship? I would suggest that for education to stand a realistic chance of achieving its desired goals of ultimately fostering better relations and enlightened outreach among faith groups, Jewish, Christian and Muslim, the oft espoused theory that mutual knowledge cures all, is clearly not enough; that to know is to love, mutual awareness and knowledge is what we would dearly promote were it not for the confrontation among co-religionists and co-nationalists. Incidentally, I believe

in patriotism – loving your country; but nationalism as in loving your country at the expense of another, is what has happened in the Caucasus for instance, when Christian Russia backed Muslim Abkhazia against Christian Georgia, when Muslim Iran played off Christian Armenia against Muslim Azerbaijan. The list continues as you all well know, Ossetians against Georgians, both Christians, Lezgins against Azeri, both Muslim and so forth. My question to you and to myself is: do we not need to highlight the twin poles of the problem, the problem of us and the Other? What about these conflicts? Where are the lines of antagonism? Do they not always correspond to religious divisions? Is there an imperative of conducting not only interfaith, but also intra-faith discourse? I would suggest that citizenship is about values that apply not to, with all the respect, brand names, but apply to promoting creative commons, based on shared values.

And in that sense, I do wish that such an initiative today could lead somewhere down the road – next year is one hundred years since Versailles: can you imagine a Versailles in 2018 that emphasizes the importance of a survey of our sources, for any chosen time period, of literature, fiction and nonfiction, mass communication, textbooks – of course, today we have civil society actively tweeting. Is there a knowledge base, a compassion of knowledge base for such tweets? Can we create a knowledge base and analyse it through regional symposia? Can we move in terms of a new twin pole, and that is not the binary twin pole, but the regional, greater good of the greater number, between West and East? We have this monolith, and I think the time has come to speak about North and South. From the Baltic to the Black Sea, from the Black Sea to the Levant, the Eastern Mediterranean, the Adriatic, all of this constitutes the cradle of civilization, and of course the relationship between the haves and the have-nots, the black and the green, the hydrocarbons and the fertile crescent. In this spirit, I salute you and look forward to your recommendations.

Panellist Statement

H. E. Sheikha Lubna Khalid Al Qasimi

Minister of State of Tolerance of the United Arab Emirates (UAE)

Your Excellencies,

Honorable Guests,

Distinguished Audience,

I would like to thank you for inviting me to this important global forum. This represents a great opportunity for me and for us to exchange ideas and experiences. Hopefully together we will be able to develop strategies which will pave the way towards equal citizenship rights for Muslims and Christians anywhere and everywhere in the world.

Irrespective of national identity, all citizens need to be granted equally universal human rights. Our states need to protect these human rights. To grant equal protection, we need to rethink our Christian-Muslim dialogue. It is only through engaging in dialogue and accepting the diversity of each other that we can reach a peaceful reconciliation.

As Christians and Muslims, we share the fundamental value of human dignity that is central to our scriptural and theological traditions, and forms an integral part of our moral fabrics. Through its all-encompassing legislation, the UAE has cemented the role of equal citizenship in its society. The UAE Constitution guarantees the rights of all individuals to practice, as equal, their religious rites.

In 2015, the UAE has enacted the Anti-Discrimination Law which criminalizes all forms of discrimination. Regardless of religion, race, ethnicity or gender, citizens and residents of the UAE can freely engage in dialogue and debate and discuss their diverse ethical beliefs and convictions. This freedom of belief and debate has largely contributed to the great economic, cultural and social success of the UAE over the last 45 years.

Dear Audience,

The core *message* of divine religions is a *message* of love. We all share same teachings: of justice, social equality, compassion, respect, peace and non-violence. Muslim-Christian dialogue dates back to the rise of Islam in the seventh century. We share a common heritage. For more than fourteen centuries, our communities of faith have been linked by their theological understandings and by geographical proximity.

Religious pluralism and civic rights were the core pillars of the Muslim Nation (The Ummah). Under Islam, Prophet Mohammed (PBUH) has established a pluralistic society in which citizenship and equal rights were granted to all people regardless of religious beliefs and practices. The Covenants of Prophet Mohammed with the Christians of his time reflect the egalitarian democratic partnership between Muslims and Christians. Islam emphasizes social justice, individual freedom and social equality. This leads us to emphasize tolerance as an essential value on which Islam is based, and as a way of living.

Today we have more than 120 churches established in the UAE, in addition to the Middle East Council of Churches which gathers under its roof all the churches existing in the country, and where fellow Christian worshipers of all colors and stripes can fulfil their rituals.

With more than ***200 nationalities living in the country, the UAE shares the universal responsibility*** to respect cultural diversity.

In order to foster tolerance in our society, the UAE had created the worldwide 1st ministerial post for tolerance. This has been instrumental in leading various initiatives, such as establishing the National Program for Tolerance through which the UAE society will continue to build up tolerance, and nurture the culture of acceptance of the other. In addition, the UAE has implemented various initiatives to consolidate the values of tolerance as integral traits in society. Some of these Initiatives, I mention “*The International Institute for Tolerance*” and “*The Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid Award for Tolerance*” which aims among other things to support Arab researchers and international specialists in the field of tolerance, in addition to a multitude of other initiatives.

In conclusion, I would like to encourage us all to work together to build more tolerant, peaceful and coexisting societies, for our present and future generations.

Thank You

Opening remarks

H. E. Dr. Hanif Hassan Ali Al Qassim

Chairman of the Geneva Centre for Human Rights Advancement and Global Dialogue

As the Chairman of the Geneva Centre for Human Rights Advancement and Global Dialogue, it is my honour and privilege to open this panel entitled “*Islam and Christianity, The Great Convergence: Working Jointly Towards Equal Citizenship Rights.*”

I wish to express our gratitude to HRH Emir Hassan of Jordan in the name of all participants in this meeting for his outstanding contribution to our deliberation. I also wish to express my great appreciation to the Permanent Mission of the People’s Democratic Republic of Algeria, the Permanent Observer Mission of the Sovereign Order of Malta, the Permanent Mission of the Lebanese Republic and the Permanent Mission of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan for co-hosting this event. Your joint commitment to this initiative is symbolic of the search of Muslims and Christians to find common ground for inter-religious cooperation.

I am also immensely grateful to the UAE Minister of State for Tolerance, H.E. Shaikha Lubna Khalid Al Qasimi, to the General Secretary of the World Council of Churches (WCC), Dr. Olav Fykse Tveit, to the Former Minister of Foreign Affairs of Algeria, H.E. Mr. Lakhdar Brahimi, to the former Acting Foreign Minister of Lebanon, H.E. Dr. Tarek Mitri, to the Director General of the International Organization for Migration (IOM), Ambassador William Lacy Swing, and to all distinguished panel members and participants for being with us today. Your participation as decision-makers brings hope for solutions that address the rise of intolerance and violence.

I would also like to thank the distinguished Ambassadors and scholars who are participating. Your expertise, wisdom and enlightenment enhance our discourse.

We also warmly welcome representatives of civil society and the media for their contributions and participation.

The Geneva Centre is particularly supportive of initiatives that enhance inter-religious understanding with the aim of combatting violence, xenophobia and marginalization of religious minorities. We invite all participants to join with us in this discourse.

Arab, Christian and Jewish societies once lived together as peaceful and thriving neighbours, joined together for societal reasons with inter-religious and multi-

cultural tolerance.

By contrast, today the social fabric for these same communities has been shredded with the escalation of violence and the destruction of the foundations of societies.

The result has been a leadership vacuum that has seeded fertile ground for the rise of violent groups seeking power in the name of religious ideology.

This deadly ideology has swept the Middle East and Africa and a spill-over effect is regrettably occurring more broadly, in locations we once considered out of reach.

The victims of violence are many and the list of atrocities unspeakable.

Let us join to observe a minute of silence to express our solidarity with the innocent victims of violence and hatred, wherever they might have suffered.

Pope Francis said these words last month:

“There are fundamentalist and violent individuals in all peoples and religions – and with intolerant generalisations they become stronger because they feed on hate and xenophobia.”

These very true words mark the character of our current world - rising populist movements create the disruptive effects of political and civil unrest, the scale of which causes serious alarm.

No one can remain indifferent to the trends we see and feel everyday. There is no denying the tragic effects of rising populism and violent extremism that are undermining our foundations.

More than ever, we must target and strengthen interfaith dialogue to promote the principles of tolerance and religious harmony.

Let us not forget, two great religions – Islam and Christianity - have a common foundation in a shared Abrahamic heritage. Both the Quran and the Bible teach the faithful to pursue peace and tolerance and both preach love. Such was already the spirit of the Charter of Medina in the days of our Holy Prophet Mohammed (PBUH) and reaffirmed by Christians in the 1970 *“Guidelines for Dialogue between Christians and Muslims”* of the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue.

Continued inter-faith intolerance and discrimination is obviously a denial of the original messages intended by both religions.

Most recently, the UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres commented in

the 2017 “*High-Level Forum on Combating Anti-Muslim Discrimination and Hatred*.” He said:

“Discrimination diminishes us all. It prevents people – and societies – from achieving their full potential.”

This statement underscores the spirit of the United Nations directing societies to peaceful co-existence through inter-religious empathy.

I would like to conclude on a positive note, as a contrast to the negative tone shadowing the world.

Today we have a tremendous opportunity to discuss the convergences between Islam and Christianity and continue our joint efforts combining our strengths to promote equal citizenship rights.

I wish you success in your deliberations and thank you all for being here with us today.

Moderator's remarks

Ambassador Idriss Jazairy

Executive Director of the Geneva Centre for Human Rights Advancement and Global Dialogue

Mr Chairman,

Excellencies, the Heads of Missions of Algeria, the Sovereign Order of Malta, Lebanon and Pakistan co-sponsoring this event with the Geneva Centre,

Madam Minister of State for Tolerance of the United Arab Emirates,

Mr Director General of the International Organisation for Migration,

The Reverend General Secretary of the World Council of Churches,

Distinguished Emeritus Foreign Ministers of Algeria and Lebanon,

Honourable Congressman and Excellency,

Reverend Dominican Friar of the English Province,

Distinguished Professor,

Excellencies,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

We are fortunate to have had such a high level response to the present side event on Islam and Christianity - The Great Convergence : Working jointly towards equal citizenship rights.

I have been asked to moderate this meeting. We have two hours 30 minutes ahead of us. I would respectfully ask the Distinguished Panel Members to limit their statement to 10 minutes, so as to leave at least 40 minutes for Q&A and 5 minutes for my summing up.

We have the great honour to be addressed by His Royal Highness Emir Hassan Bin Talal of Jordan in the following video message :

(Message of HRH Prince Hassan bin Talal)

We ask the Distinguished Permanent Representative of Jordan H. E. Saja Majali to kindly convey to His Royal Highness our gratitude for his inspiring message which will guide our deliberations.

I now have the honour to invite H. E. Dr. Hanif Hassan Ali Al Qassim, the Chairman of the Geneva Centre to make his opening remarks.

I join H. E. Dr. Hanif Al Qassim (Chairman of the Geneva Centre makes his statement) in extending a warm welcome to the Distinguished Participants on

behalf of the staff of the Centre.

Two of the 4 co-sponsoring Heads of Missions sponsoring the present event have registered to speak.

First H. E. Marie-Thérèse Pictet-Althann, Ambassador and Permanent Observer of the Sovereign Order of Malta. Madam you have the floor

(Ambassador Pictet-Althann makes her remarks)

We thank you.

Then, H. E. Tehmina Janjua, Ambassador, Permanent Representative of Pakistan

(Ambassador Janjua makes her remarks)

I thank the Distinguished Ambassador who will alas ! be leaving us soon to take up a very senior position back home and we wish her well.

This is an opportunity to express our gratitude to Ambassador Delmi of Algeria, Ambassador Janjua of Pakistan, Ambassador Pictet-Althann of the Sovereign Order of Malta and Ambassador Riachi-Assaker of Lebanon for having granted the sponsorship of their Missions to this side event.

It is now my privilege to invite the Distinguished Minister of State for Tolerance of the UAE H.E. Sheikha Lubna Khalid Al Qasimi to take the floor.

(Minister Al Qasimi addresses the meeting)

In the name of all of you, I should like to thank Her Excellency for her inspiring remarks.

We are honoured to have with us the Reverend Dr. Olav Fykse Tveit, the General Secretary of the World Council of Churches whom I invite now to give us the benefit of his views.

(General Secretary Tveit addresses the meeting)

We are most grateful to the Reverend Dr. Tveit representing over 348 churches in 110 countries world-wide for his remarks

I am proud now to call on Minister Lakhdar Brahimi, my Elder and Better in Algerian diplomacy but also one of the world's respected Elders.

(Minister Brahimi addresses the meeting)

Thank you, Excellency and Dear Brother, for your words of wisdom.

H. E. Tarek Mitri, is a respected public figure of Lebanon, itself a unique experiment in religious diversity. He is therefore well placed to show us the way

towards this “*Great Convergence*” in whose pursuit we are concerting today.

(Minister Mitri addresses the meeting)

Thank you Excellency, we have a proverb in Algeria which says : “*Ask the one who’s gone through it, not the doctor.*” You have had the experience but you are also the doctor : so this is a double whammy !

The Honourable Mark Siljander inspired me by his commitment to humanity when I was ambassador to Washington. Looking at the Aramaic texts of the New Testament, he has found more convergence between Christianity and Islam than meets the eye. Some of this was lost in the translation to Greek and Latin. Hence he has devoted his efforts to clearing the air by writing a remarkable book on “*A deadly misunderstanding between Christianity and Islam.*” Please tell us about your stunning findings, Excellency.

(Congressman Siljander addresses the meeting)

Thank you for your enlightening contribution.

The Reverend Timothy Radcliffe is a former Master of the Dominican Order. We met at a memorable Christian-Muslim Summit held in the Vatican in November 2014 under His Holiness Pope Francis. The Great Convergence between Islam and Christianity became obvious at this historical Summit. Tell us Father Radcliffe how to move it forward.

(Father Radcliffe addresses the meeting)

Amen. Thank you Reverend Timothy Radcliffe

We have listened to Government decision-makers, to leaders of faith-based groups, to diplomats as well as opinion makers. We now turn to academe with Professor of Islamic History Carole Hillenbrand who has just published yet another new book on Islam. What lessons do we draw from history to relaunch Christian-Islamic solidarity at the service of the promotion of equal and all-encompassing citizenship rights? You have the floor, Professor.

(Professor Hillenbrand addresses the meeting)

Thank you Professor. I can understand why you were called an “*author without peer*” by commentators of your last book.

Now it’s time to turn to the audience.

The Q&A period will last 40 minutes. Statements should not exceed 5 minutes and if they are questions expecting answers, a maximum of 3 minutes otherwise the questions will remain unanswered.

Allow me to draw attention in this respect to the draft agenda of a World Conference on Religions, Creeds and/or Other Value Systems and Equal Citizenship Rights which was referred to by the Panel. An explanatory note has been circulated in this hall and further copies are available. Comments thereon would be most welcome.

First let me recognize the Distinguished Director General of IOM. Migration is intimately linked to the denial of equal citizenship rights. Distressed people are on the move today as never before. It has become a world-wide phenomenon calling for multilateral action. This is an opportunity to pay tribute to the pioneering work of IOM and UNHCR to alleviate the sufferings of these people. Ambassador Swing you have provided outstanding leadership to summon such multilateral action. It's therefore a great pleasure to give you the floor.

(Director General Swing makes his remarks)

CONCLUDING REMARKS

Distinguished Sponsors, Panel Members and Participants,

The Geneva Centre is grateful to you for making this a great day. As world leaders and diplomats as well as opinion leaders, you made a special point of attending this event. By doing so you have expressed confidence in the tremendous potential of a great convergence between Islam and Christianity that can be conducive to the advancement of equal citizenship rights world-wide.

This side event was needed to update a global approach at the Human Rights Council on the issue of minorities of different religious affiliations across the world. The Centre earlier organised side events and issued publications on some components of this problematique, in particular that related to Muslim minorities in the West, to Islamophobia and to Deradicalization. As was the Centre's intention expressed in our previous side events in response to suggestions to broaden our approach to all minorities, we have held the present meeting to start a process to address the broader picture of all minorities.

The aim pursued in the short term is to provide them with better protection against physical violence and also against moral violence in the form of discrimination. As mentioned during our meeting, the ultimate goal in the long term is to ensure equal citizenship rights for all, the very notion of "*faith-based minorities*" being replaced by that of one among many "*social components of diversity*," merging with many others and which, when combined with

commonality of aspiration, define the contemporary identity of every nation.

International and internecine conflict in parts of the Arab region have created a vacuum which has been occupied by terrorist groups. These have attacked majority and minority faith-based groups. The backlash of their criminal action has extended to other regions. Social collapse on one side, social frustration on the other have been mutually reinforcing causes of violence and hatred.

Minorities, and in particular women and girls, are particularly at risk, whether Christian, Muslim, Yazidi or others, whether in the Arab region or in the rest of the world.

Progress of military action against terrorist groups in the Arab region is moving apace and victory over this form of organised crime on the battlefield is nigh. But social scars will not disappear with their defeat. It is suggested that Islam and Christianity, which together are the largest faith-based cluster, could constitute the hard core of an effort by the International Community to restore social harmony and promote equal citizenship rights. This would constitute the ultimate victory over violent extremism and subtler forms of discrimination.

Finally the “*Great Convergence between Christianity and Islam*” should help roll back the spread of phobic language encompassing off-the-peg ideologies rejecting the Other’s faith. There is no other way to ensure sustainability to the desired outcome.

Panellist Statement

Ambassador Marie-Thérèse Pictet-Althann

Permanent Observer of the Sovereign Order of Malta to the United Nations and Other International Organizations in Geneva

Excellencies,

Dear Colleagues and Friends,

On behalf of the Order of Malta I would like to thank Ambassador Idriss Jazairy and the Geneva Centre for Human Rights Advancement and Global Dialogue for inviting our Permanent Mission to participate in this promising panel discussion. I am honored to participate in this distinguished panel.

At the outset allow me to briefly introduce the Institution I represent and its position on the international stage.

Founded in the 11th century, the Sovereign Order of Malta is a lay religious order of the Catholic Church. Its mission is based on the inspiring principles of witnessing the Faith and service to the poor and the suffering. Across the world, the Order is dedicated to the ***preservation of life and human dignity*** and the care of all those in need, regardless of their religions, their beliefs and their origins, as coded in the Order's Constitution. It is neutral, impartial and apolitical. By definition we cooperate with different faith and religiously-based actors, including Islamic institutions in various regions of the world.

To-day the Order of Malta is active in 120 countries and has established diplomatic relations with 106 States, a number of which are Muslim countries. As a subject of international public law, it was associated from the very beginning in the elaboration of International Humanitarian Law encoded in the Geneva Conventions and, as a Permanent Observer to the United Nations, in the development of human rights instruments.

The ***Universal Declaration of Human Rights*** together with the Geneva Conventions and the international legal instruments adopted since have become the foundation of common societal understanding and behavior. Furthermore a number of ***regional instruments***, such as the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights, the Arab Charter on Human Rights, the European Convention on Human Rights and the ASEAN Human Rights Declaration have confirmed this evolution.

Article 7 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights stipulates: "*All are equal before the law and are entitled without any discrimination to equal*

protection of the law.”

This implies that ***the base of equal citizenship rights is non-discrimination***, i.e. equal treatment of all citizens implemented through legislation that guarantees every citizen equal rights in all spheres of society. Therefore citizenship becomes the criterion of equal participation possibilities in the management of society as a whole and its protection a key tool for identity, integration and solidarity.

In order to strengthen equal citizenship rights, it is essential that minorities fully participate in the activities and decision making process of their communities so as to avoid becoming a sub-group and thus being marginalized which in turn jeopardizes social harmony. This applies as well to internally displaced and stateless persons whose human and citizenship rights are often neglected and even denied. Cultural and religious diversity is a fundamental component of any well functioning society in which faith-based minorities have a special role to play.

Across the world today Christians, Muslims and many other religious communities experience intolerance, hatred, discrimination and persecution. According to The Pew Research Center, over 75% of the world's population lives in areas with severe religious restrictions. Over 50% of all countries have some limitation or restriction placed upon religious minorities; in 25% some or all religious minorities are illegal and in 24% countries have placed restrictions on building, leasing or repairing places of worship.* Because some of the most restrictive countries are very populous, more than 5 billion people are living in countries with high government restrictions on religion or high social hostilities involving religion, the brunt of which often falls on religious minorities.** Such is the situation that in many parts of the world the existence of religious minorities is severely weakened and depends on the respect of their full rights.

Christian communities in particular are victims of persecution in many countries. With this fact in mind, some Member States are considering introducing the term of 'Christianophobia' in the on-coming resolution of this Council. This would not mean, however, that such a term is directed against any other religion.

It is of course the ***responsibility of the State*** not only to implement the international norms it has ratified, but also to create the national legislation on which a real equality in citizenship rights is guaranteed. In practice, national authorities, including political parties, should foster participation, tolerance and

*. Numbers taken from the dataset collected since 1990 by the Religion and State-Minorities Project (ARDA Project): <http://www.thearda.com/ras/>.

** Pew Forum

dialogue within communities.

At the same time ***religious leaders also have a clear responsibility*** which can be exercised through different channels, such as inter and intra-faith dialogue and cooperation between religious and political components of society. An example in this field is the Central African Republic where structural violence was blamed on so-called religious conflicts when, in fact, it was much more due to a lack of rule of law and good governance. In response, the Cardinal Archbishop of Bangui, the Chief Imam and the Protestant leader of the country formed an Interfaith Peace Platform with practical components, to monitor peace and reconciliation.

In the international context it is interesting to note that there are many such ongoing dialogues. A most recent example is the resumption last month of high-level discussions between the Holy See and the Al-Azhar University in Cairo.

One of the Order of Malta's most moving experiences in ***interfaith cooperation*** is in Lebanon, a country of 17 different officially recognized religious communities, where veiled Muslim nurses in our clinics proudly wear the Cross of the Order on their chests. This is a picture that by itself constitutes our main response to fanaticism and extremism while illustrating the need to translate our good words into action.

As it is unrealistic to imagine the disappearance of the concept of minority as such, it is essential to ***promote religious and faith literacy at all levels of society***. Initiatives relating to inter-religious and inter-faith dialogue and cooperation need therefore to be inclusive and encouraged at the grass-roots level. This can be achieved through human rights education and training on minority rights, non-discrimination and equality, freedom of religion or belief.

Religious authorities have a particular responsibility in the field of ***education*** from the earliest age on. Teachers need to affirm respect for other religions by emphasizing the peaceful, tolerant and conciliatory contents of their religion. As a community we should consider offering scholarships to children of all religions to help eradicate interfaith conflict through education and the promotion of dialogue between different cultures and faith.

All these measures, whether potential or concrete, should be part of the road map which defines the way forward towards the World Conference proposed in the Concept note before us. The agenda should clearly illustrate the interface between positive law and religion in the sense that Christian and Muslim religious leaders be encouraged to promote the principle of non-discrimination

both by ***supporting existing international and domestic legal instruments and mechanisms; and by reaffirming this principle in common declarations, actions and approaches, based on their respective religious teachings.***

Another objective of the World Conference should be to propose practical recommendations to close the huge gap that exists between the adoption by States of legal instruments and the effective implementation on the ground. Citizens need to see and feel that their rights are being respected and that they have the means to enact them.

In conclusion I would like to quote from the address given by the Order of Malta's Foreign Minister at the Symposium "Religions Together for Humanitarian Action" held here at the Palais des Nations in May 2015: "Religious motivation can induce violence when separated from moral content and conflicts may contain religious elements. However, they are always driven by cultural, ethnic, territorial and other factors such as external pressures. Perhaps ***the answer to conflicts with a religious element is not less religion, but more of religion's peaceful, non-violent content as a rich source of reconciliation, social tolerance, devotion, humanitarian commitment, empowerment and peace-building.***"

Let us therefore, in our further discussions, aim to identify a model of inclusive citizenship rights that is firmly based on the values promoted by Christianity and Islam.

Marie-Thérèse Pictet-Althann

Ambassador

Permanent Observer of the Order of Malta

Panellist Statement

Ambassador Tehmina Janjua

Permanent Representative of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan to the United Nations and Other International Organizations in Geneva

We have been asked to address three issues:

Identify the convergences between Christianity and Islam

Citizenship Rights and Minorities in different parts of the world

Implementation of Resolution 16/18 in the context of citizenship rights.

If we are to address the issue of citizenship rights/minorities globally, then we need to go beyond the relationship of Christianity and Islam. We also need to go beyond viewing this issue from the perspective of religion alone. It is true that the issue of citizenship right has been brought to the fore by the situation of Muslim communities in Europe. And in that context, interaction between Christianity and Islam is a factor. But it is only one amongst a complex of factors. Historical, political, economic, cultural and democratic factors are probably of greater significance.

Let me elaborate this point. The increasing strain on the Muslim majority communities in many European countries clearly does not arise from theological disputes. Indeed, as has been pointed out in the very useful background documentation of this event, and the copious literature on Christianity and Islam, there exist, major commonalities between the two Abrahamic religions. There are, of course, differences as well, but these only assume salience when other factors, primarily political and economic factors, come into play. Political factors may include perceived policies of aggression of government of adopted countries against home countries, especially when these seem to be a continuation of past colonial policies. Economic factors may include a sense of exclusion and discrimination on the part of the minority community, and on the part of the majority community as sense that excessive resources are being diverted to the minority community to the grave detriment of their own economic well being. Religious and cultural differences are then exploited without shame, without scruples, by political figures to garner political support and make a bid for political power.

This dynamic has been unleashed in Europe. It is also being witnessed in a depressingly large number of countries in other parts of the world.

So what is to be done?

I would argue that if we are to secure the basic rights of minority communities, and let alone achieve equal rights for them, then we must keep an unrelenting focus on the fundamental economic and political drivers behind the worsening situation of the minority communities. The economic anxieties and the political concerns of both minority and majority communities must be addressed frontally, without any equivocation. Failure to do so simply results in surrendering political space to the more extreme elements.

While I would maintain the primacy of political and economic factors, it is true that in many cases, these factors have been submerged by a poisonous religious and cultural rhetoric. Hence, the immediate challenge in such cases is to urgently counter the rhetoric of prejudice, of difference, and of exclusion.

We should respond to this challenge by resolutely engaging in a rights based discourse – drawing upon universal principles embodied in Christianity and Islam, indeed in all major religions.

The operationalization of resolution 16/18 would be an appropriate place to give such rights-based discourse. The following measures can be taken:

Setting up an observatory within the Office of High Commissioner to catalogue instances of hate speech, xenophobia, and even concrete evidence of attacks against any religious community/individuals.

Regular reporting by all Member States on efforts undertaken to implement resolution 16/18.

Setting up of a mechanism even Special Rapporteur to address the issues reflected in 16/18.

A comprehensive debate within the Human Rights Council to see how to examine the issues addressed in 16/18 are being looked at and implemented in member states.

Panellist Statement

Reverend Dr. Olav Fykse Tveit

General Secretary of the World Council of Churches (WCC)

Thank you moderator, dear excellencies, dear sisters and brothers in the one humanity, thank you for this opportunity to share from the point of view of the World Council of Churches, which is actually much more than 110 churches, it is 348 churches in 110 countries, representing more than half a billion believers.

Numbers are not what we should discuss today but I think we should be aware that Christians and Muslims together represent about half of the world's population. So as we are here, we are not talking about only ourselves. We are talking about humanity in many ways. That is the first point I would like to make: We at the World Council of Churches, we address these issues from many perspectives, but first of all we address it from a theological perspective. What does it mean to believe today in the one God that created the one humanity? And what are the implications of that in our time? Well, it definitely should not be that believing in one God, we see only part of humanity as our sisters and brothers for whom we care and offer the same rights as ourselves.

There is an accountability to God that has to lead to an accountability to every human being. This is our mutual accountability to one another, to every human being, whatever belief or non-belief we have. I think this is a very important reflection about the theme of today, working jointly toward equal citizenship. It is not only a political or a legal principle; it is also a principle that expresses our deepest faith in the one God creating the one humanity.

We see today in many ways that this is not an obviously shared faith, not even in our Christian communities. Our Christian faith is also used to polarize the world, to polarize among people, and even to discriminate, again and again, even within the Christian community. We as the World Council of Churches have had since 1971 an interfaith office, and this has developed to become an important dimension of our work for unity, justice and peace.

When we call our churches and all who want to join us for the pilgrimage of justice and peace we want to express what we believe is a common agenda also for today.

Let me share with you three examples from our own work of today that illustrate how we try to address this in a practical way. One is built on experiences we had also with the Al-Azhar Mosque and the Grand Imam of Al-Azhar here in Geneva some months ago as he visited us at the World Council of Churches

together with several members of the Muslim Council of Elders. And we met our institute outside Geneva, our Ecumenical Institute in Bossey, which celebrated its 70th anniversary. The Grand Imam represents an institute that has millions of students. We have fifty students. But we believe we have the same purpose, namely to be a place where we work together to understand one another, and what are one another's shared faith and values. Also, in a wider sense, it was a significant sign that he wanted to come to visit one of our institutions for education, actually our most significant programme for education, as this is a very basic dimension of what citizenship means.

This leads to my second point. A month ago I led church leaders from different parts of the world to Iraq to visit both the Christian leadership and the leadership of other faiths, particularly of the Muslim faith, as well as the political leadership, both in Bagdad and Erbil. We were analyzing many dimensions of the effects of the tragedies in this country, some of them coming not only from the last years of violence and extreme violence but also the war that started in 2003. That war was started against a unified Christianity protesting against the idea at all of using invasion as a way to solve a national political problem. And we announced then a prophecy that unfortunately would seem fulfilled. One of the first effects of that invasion was that the Christian communities would become victims. Today we have almost only one tenth of the numbers of Christians that were there 30 years ago in Iraq. Even more so, it is important for us to visit them and be part of their life. Both from their side and also from others we talked to, we were given many examples of why there is such an opportunity now to find a way to rebuild Iraq as a country of people of many faiths. And the international community must take this opportunity, after the release of Mosul and other cities, to now really start building this community with security.

We learned that there is a need to pay attention to what is taught in schools about one another. When we asked about the curriculum in Iraq, many textbooks didn't really mention the others and their history in the land. There was not an awareness taught in these textbooks about the Christian presence going back centuries and centuries. This is of course a first, basic step, to analyze but also to accept the citizenship of others, that they exist, not only as minorities but as someone who belongs there. "*Minorities*" can be a dubious word because there can also be a sense from that word that you don't really belong. It is not only an issue of numbers - so we must be careful we don't use that word all the time, but that we also say "*communities*" - those who belong here.

A third example I'd like to mention is not from that part of the world but from Nigeria. Together with Muslim representatives led by Prince Ghazi and

myself and other Christian leaders we recently visited Nigeria and particularly the northern part, to listen to the victims of the violence done in the name of religion in that part of the world. One of the outcomes of the visit was that we initiated a joint institute in Kaduna – that has been a hot spot of religiously-based violence in Nigeria. In this centre, people should come together as Muslims and Christians to listen to the same stories, to help the victims and to institute new projects particularly among young people about living together. When we launched this centre last year the governor of Kaduna State said that this is one of the signs of hope in our country, and let it be the day we leave behind us the rhetoric that we always identify our religious affiliation first. People should be saying we are from Kaduna and Nigeria, before we say “*I am a Muslim*” or “*I am a Christian.*” This was the time to be the human beings or citizens in the city and the country before starting to identify oneself by belonging to the religious communities. I think that is a word for all of us.

Let me end by saying these are not questions that we face only in the parts of the world I have mentioned so far. In my own country, Norway, and in other parts of Europe today, we see that the citizenship that we have as a basis in most of these countries for legal rights is challenged from a popular position based on fear and exclusion: “*The others do not belong here.*” It is a matter of how we understand one another as human beings and the human rights we claim as a basis for our belonging as citizens in a state.

Our sense of the “*one humanity*” must also be expressed to refugees. They are human beings of another country which they have had to flee to survive. We are very ashamed that some countries actually discriminate among refugees based on religion, saying that they are not welcome because they are a Muslim. We are very ashamed and we hope that this will not be what we will see in many parts of Europe or other parts of the world, whether it is in the name of our religion or in the name of other religions.

Panellist Statement

Minister Lakhdar Brahimi

Former Foreign Minister of Algeria and a member of the Elders

I am deeply grateful to His Excellency Dr. Hanif Hassan Ali Al Qassim and the Geneva Centre for Human rights Advancements and Global Dialogue for inviting me to this event.

And it is a particular pleasure for me to take the floor under the leadership and guidance of my compatriot and former colleague Ambassador Idriss Jazairy.

I am deeply impressed by the meticulous preparation for this side event: from logistics, to background papers, concept note and substantive guidance, not to forget the excellent lunch, everything has been done with attention to every detail, to make the time we are going to spend in this room both pleasant and productive.

My congratulations and gratitude to the Chair of the Centre, to you, my dear Idriss and to all the dynamic staff who helped make all this happen.

The theme selected for this side event and the creative idea of a World Conference to address issues of paramount importance not only for Christians and Muslims but for humankind as a whole.

Dr. Kissinger recently said that the Middle East was in total chaos. And Dr. Ashraf Ghani, President of Afghanistan said that terrorism had become a problem for the entire world and will take at least another 20 years to defeat.

The part of the world we come from, is in the eye of the storm. Like you, Ambassador Jazairy and the overwhelming majority of people in the so-called Muslim majority countries are horrified by the barbaric violence committed by groups who claim to serve Islam. Daesh, Al-Qaeda, Boko-Haram and similar groups in our countries and in Europe are abusing Islam and gravely trying to destroy its values, its cultures and its civilisation.

Obviously, it is not enough for us to denounce their action and declare that their claim to represent any form of Islam is unfounded and unacceptable. They are from our societies; they have been to our schools, grown up in our midst and it is up to us to do what it takes to protect our young from them, to isolate them and actively cooperate with others to defeat them in our own countries and in the rest of the world.

I am particularly concerned by three aspects of the problems we are discussing.

FIRST, It is outrageous that Christians in some of our own countries are targeted by the so-called Jihadists. I, for one refuse to call Christians in countries such as Syria, Iraq, Egypt and Lebanon minorities. Their roots in these countries are as deep, if not deeper than those of anyone else. I deeply regret that in a country where tolerance was a matter of pride such as Indonesia, the successful Governor of Jakarta has to face trial for blasphemy under very doubtful circumstances. I am sorry that Churches have been targeted in so many countries, that entire families have been savagely attacked in their own homes in Egypt.

I fully understand that Christians are fleeing all the threats that have targeted them these past few years; and I am grateful to the countries who are offering them asylum. I said at a conference 3 years ago and I say again here, I hope that the countries offering asylum will not readily give them nationality and that most, if not all of them will come back to their countries of origin.

In view of this situation, I hope that Christians and Muslims in the so-called Muslim majority countries will together do all what need to be done to make sure that Christians are protected and allowed to practice their faith as they had for centuries. Of course there is every reason to be proud of heroic actions that Muslim young men have spontaneously undertaken to support or protect their Christian compatriots: when Daesh first entered the Syrian Province of Rakka in Syria, they damaged the Cross of a local church. In the Middle of the night, 7 young men climbed on the roof of the Church and, at the peril of their lives, repaired the damage. In Indonesia, when young thugs calling themselves Muslims tried to prevent Christians from attending Midnight Mass on Christmas night in an Indonesian village, young Muslims accompanied and protected their Christian compatriots.

SECOND, the Sunni-Shia divide is threatening to become Islam's long, devastating, all out war. Khomeini's revolution, the Iran-Iraq War, the Taliban in Afghanistan and in Pakistan and the American invasion of Iraq have all contributed to the present situation.

In April 2004 I warned, publicly, in Baghdad, that a savage civil war may be threatening to erupt in Iraq. I begged political as well as religious leaders to prevent that catastrophe from happening. Little was done to protect the country from that fatality. Quite the opposite.

Some, including Mr. Frank Walter Steinmeier, the former Foreign Minister of Germany and its next President, are suggesting a regional conference or series of conferences similar to the Westphalia processes in the 17th Century.

Four major internal conflicts have been poorly managed so far in the Middle East: Libya, Syria, Iraq and Yemen. I very much hope that the World Conference will pay closed attention to each of them.

THIRD, the far too long neglected Palestinian question will, I hope occupy a pride of place in the World Conference. The inability of Fatah and Hamas to reconcile, the near total neglect of the issue by the rest of the Arab World, the domination of Israeli politics by extreme rightist parties and individuals have all but killed any prospects of a resolution of the problem through direct negotiations between Israelis and Palestinians.

Israel's present Minister of Defense, Mr. Lieberman, is suggesting to expel all Israeli Arabs and the US Administration is sending to Tel Aviv, an Ambassador who seems to be more Israeli than American.

The Quartet has been a total failure and the best that can happen to it is that it ceases to exist.

Around the world, there is a kind of softly expressed sympathy for the plight of the Palestinians and fearful impatience with the arrogant extremism of the Israeli authorities. That has led a large number of countries to recognize the Palestinian State. However, many simply cannot summon the courage to challenge Mr. Netanyahu and his right-wing government.

The Palestinians are slowly developing a promising peaceful struggle for their rights which includes BDS (Boycott, Disinvestment and Sanctions). If the peaceful struggle for Palestinian rights is not strongly supported to deliver results in the not too distant future, I do not see how Israeli policy of naked force and fast advance toward an Apartheid Regime will not lead to Palestinian counter-violence in the form of a new Intifada or another form of violent struggle.

FOURTH, and very quickly, you know better than I do that, there are many initiatives, in all parts of the world, similar to yours - groups, NGOs, Conferences as well as Academic Research - all directly or indirectly discussing and trying to address the issue of equal citizenship. I am sure the Centre already has extensive knowledge and contact with such individuals or groups. Perhaps an exhaustive compilation of these initiatives already exists; If it does not, you may wish to make that an integral part of the preparation of the World Conference.

Panellist Statement

Minister Tarek Mitri

Former Acting Foreign Minister of Lebanon and Director of the Issam Fares Institute for Public Policy and International Affairs (IFI)

In the nineteen nineties, there were many discussions that revealed differing views between Christians and Muslims on human rights. Four controversial issues emerged as having a bearing on the understanding of human rights. The most important arose over the question of the universality of human rights. In other words do they have to be viewed as culturally relative? The second revolved around the primacy of communal rights over individual rights. The third touched on various policies and their conditionality on observing human rights. The fourth dealt with the double standards in calling for the respect of human rights or selectively trying to impose them.

More often than not, there was no religious controversy. Theological arguments contrasting God-given laws and human-made principles (embodied in the Universal Declaration) lost much of their prominence, even if they did not lose their appeal. Differences could be transcended by the affirmation that human rights derived from the very humanity and dignity of the human person. Natural theology in Christian thought and the Quranic notion of al fitra (natural disposition of human nature) seemed to bridge those differences.

In subsequent years and until today, fostering citizenship raised a number of issues related to basic human rights. Co-citizens belong to one homeland, they are often defined by their national identity and culture rather than by religious affiliation, even if a state's self-understanding is shaped by a religious heritage. Yet, unequal civil and religious rights, no matter how justified they are, remained a problematic reality. The affirmation of group rights, associated with an unfair political representation for all citizens, reinforced majority-minority divisions and mutual perceptions. In certain cases, minority rights were opposed to majority rule or even aspiration. In other cases the claim of those rights, as specifically communal, enclaved members of communities in their own society.

Be that as it may, majority-minority relations are changing historical realities. Christians of the Arab world have been recognized as communities in law and public conscience since the birth of Islam. The statute, or rather the pact of the *dhimma*, while expecting their loyalty to the Islamic state, has protected them. Nevertheless, it has also implied a measure of inferiorization, both civil and political. This recognition was a form of acceptance, or even legitimization, of religious plurality at a time when it was deficient elsewhere. But such pluralism,

in the sense of an acceptance of plurality, was in a way, a hierarchical pluralism.

Beginning in the early 16th century under the Ottomans, the *dhimma* system organizing pluralism reached its highest point of codification. During the 19th century, European powers, tempted by the Ottoman Empire's weaknesses, and having adopted an imperialistic attitude, developed relations with various minority communities. In fact, hierarchical pluralism was exploited in favor of the needs of external domination. The Christians were often faced with difficult choices that differed according to their character, religious affiliation, their social condition, and the political fluctuations they experienced. But on the whole they aspired to a "citizenship" freed from direct or indirect domination from abroad. While their fight for political and civil equality opposed them to the increasingly moribund Ottoman Empire, it united them with the Muslims in a national struggle for independence. For the majority of Christians, this struggle was to continue against the European nations after they had shared the spoils of the First World War. In the latter part of the 19th century and in the early 20th century, Christians played a role in shaping a new social and political order that far outweighed their numerical importance. Their contributions, more in culture than in political activity, attempted to shake loose their minority status and identity. The nation-states that emerged from the empire, including modern Turkey, came as a rejection of the Ottoman past.

A large number of Christians, however, were opposed to the separatist tendencies of some of their coreligionists. They opted for modern nationalist and universalizing ideologies. They emphasized their common ethno-cultural identity with Muslims as the basis of independence and modern nation building. The patriotic bond cemented opposition to the Ottoman central and oppressive power and later to the dominating European powers. Accordingly in the struggle for independence (and its achievement) the pact of citizenship was established, superseding the former *dhimma* pact. The revolution of 1919 in Egypt was a case in point. In Palestine, the pact of citizenship was affirmed as Christians and Muslims suffered together dispossession and ethnic cleansing.

The Arab uprisings or revolutions of 2011 initiated, in an unanticipated manner, transformations in a region that seemed resistant to change. For some time, expectations and hopes energized the process of transformation. Today's disillusionment, though understandable, is often rushed and at times engineered. Disillusionment, uncertainty and fear notwithstanding, the yearning for dignity, freedom, and political participation that motivated revolutions against patrimonial authoritarian regimes cannot be dismissed as ephemeral. Today, the weakness of state institutions that are grounded in the

rule of law, and the fragility of national cohesion and identity, are exacerbated further by the rapid and unanticipated collapse of the old order. These developments favor a tendency to over-emphasize the strength of primordial ties in comparison with civic ties that are constitutive of a modern democratic society. One cannot ignore the resurgence or reinvention of sub-national identities and the centrifugal forces at work in many Arab countries. Many members of communities, not only religious and cultural minorities, seem to have lost their aspirations to a state for all. They beg for a power structure that can protect them from another community. Weakened states and political and electoral strategies of mobilization accentuate communalism and encourage the surfacing of narratives of victimhood.

Re-vitalizing the pact of citizenship necessitates the rebuilding of state institutions on the foundation of the rule of law. The state's chief obligation is to protect its citizens, all its citizens. Politics of inclusion in fractured societies are a condition for equal citizenship.

Two weeks ago, Sheikh al Azhar, Dr. Ahmad al Tayyib, convened a major Muslim-Christian conference on "*Citizenship, freedom and diversity*." At the end of it, he issued a seminal declaration. Faithful to the method of "*Ta'sil*" (rooting in Islamic soil), he starts by stating that the concept of citizenship has its origin in Islam, more particularly in the constitution of al Madina where Muslims and non-Muslims are one nation. He denounced every practice that contradicts today the principle of citizenship, affirming that the national and constitutional state established on the principles of citizenship, equality and the rule of law excludes the notion of contract between communities and the notion of the minority under the protection of the majority. He warned against the excessive use of the concept of minority, implying discrimination and separation under the pretext of granting minority rights. In a context where minority-centered concerns are on the rise, emigration of Christians-whether forced or voluntary-reaching unprecedented levels, mounting fears and uncertainties, the statements of al Azhar gain greater significance and timeliness. In opposing fragmentation of our societies, they point to policies different from what we see. Let us hope that they contribute to the making of new policies.

Panellist Statement

Honourable Mark D. Siljander

Former Member of the US Congress and Former US Ambassador to the United Nations

I want to thank Amb. Jazairy, whom I consider one of my heroes of faith and diplomacy; and this Center, for the courage to establish this side event.

Excellencies and friends:

“Tolerance is a cheap, low grade version of love.” NT Wright, Bishop of Durham

The Problem

The traditional approach dealing with East/West relations typically restates the obvious---rehashing what we already know about faith, history, and well-known commonalities of the Abrahamic faiths, towards a focus on tolerance and humanity. While attendees leave more enlightened, old biases remain and remain unchanged.

The result of hundreds of interfaith and peace conferences working through the same paradigm, is a world still divided and nearly out of control. We need not affirm Einstein’s definition of *“insanity”* as repeating the same process over and over, hoping for a different outcome.

The Solution?

The breakthrough in Muslim Christian understanding will come when we are able to muster the courage to deal with previously forbidden issues that most all Interfaith and peace conferences carefully avoid. It will require transformation of how we think and altering paradigms. Boldness is required in pursuit of questions of faith some might consider offensive or even heretical.

Please join me on a journey of discovery, of new information that may challenge our existing thinking and even our fixed prejudices. I once disliked Muslims and the Qur’an until challenged about by narrow mindedness and bigotry. A comparative study of the Qur’an and the Semitic languages associated with the three Abrahamic holy books crushed my narrow paradigm. The ensuing discoveries reveal new and vastly expanded common ground between Islam and Christianity and in practical terms how to love and respect each other. This will most effectively work toward *“equal citizenship.”*

The constructs of my journey are drawn from 30 years of traveling to 145

countries. It is firsthand knowledge and experience of what works and what does not work. And I have experienced both—and learned from both.

This is a path to discovering common ground and will inspire new thinking sufficient to begin a counter movement mitigating militancy within Islam, and bigotry and ignorance (Islamophobia) in the West.

Finding True Peace in a Storm of Conflict and Division:

I have worked with a team over several decades and we have discovered within the ancient Semitic texts an “*algorithm of behavior*” that when wrapped in specific steps of practical human interaction, consistently produce peace in otherwise complex and hopelessly political and religious conflicts and crises. This is indeed a bold statement, but it is back by a track-record of successful engagements.

The good news is that for this process to be initiated, it only requires a few dedicated faithful inspirers like Mandela, Gandhi, Mother Teresa to impact the many and make history.

Real Life Example: Darfur, Sudan & UN/AU Peacekeepers

As an example, in 2004, I had the opportunity to meet and pray numerous times with the President of Sudan, His Excellency Omar al Bashir and his Foreign minister, Ali Karti. Consistent with Bridges’ behavioral algorithm, developed for a one on one style of engagement, our conversations de-emphasized politics. The president and foreign minister relished our numerous conversations reviewing our groundbreaking common ground discoveries between the Muslim and Christian holy books. During this time the president refused to consider the UN’s resolution to deploy UN Peacekeepers in Darfur, and as tragic as the human suffering was in Darfur, we did not bring up the matter. Eventually, over several visits with the president, he inquired of our team, “*what would you recommend we do with Darfur?*” I responded that he could retain his opposition to UN resolutions 1593 and 1706, while in the meantime draft a new resolution that would include a hybrid force of African and UN troops that would include a large contingent of Muslims deployed in three phases. This would allow Pres. al Bashir to maintain his position of strength while accommodating the world’s demand for peacekeepers and protection of those suffering in Darfur. He agreed and asked me to write the resolution. The rest is history.

These conversations with world leaders are patterned, in part, by the U.S. example of over 60 years of U.S. Congressional Prayer Breakfast Groups. These groups consist of members of Congress who meet together weekly and

pray for each other, leaving politics at the door for that one hour a week. These gatherings over breakfast consistently lead to growing friendships and spiritual camaraderie. This became our template for igniting hope in desperate international crises, and offering help initiating peaceful reconciliation.

Hope is indeed what this message gives to many who otherwise hold out little hope for anything but a horrific Armageddon, through what Bernard Lewis, rightly or wrongly referred to as, “*the clash of cultures.*”

The Way Forward

In this light, I call on the Centre to convene a global conference to more deeply evaluate these new findings of the similarities of matters that Muslims and Christians have historically considered “*heretical.*”

Thank you very much for the honor to be part of this auspicious occasion.

Panellist Statement

Reverend Timothy Radcliffe

Dominican friar of the English Province, and former Master of the Order of Preachers (commonly known as the Dominicans).

Today the world is being swept by a rise in populism, xenophobia, the fear of those who are different. This fear of strangers is reinforced by modern means of communication, where communities of the likeminded are in constant contact. This is the echo chamber of the cyber world. Strangers are feared because of the difference of their religion, their ethnicity, their culture.

At their best, the three Abrahamic religions challenge this fear of difference. This is because all three are founded on a relationship with God is utterly different but intimately close. The creator is infinitely different from his creatures, but as St Augustine said, ‘closer to me than I am to myself.’ Or as the Qu’ran says, ‘closer to me than my jugular vein.’ If we love our God who is utterly different, then how can we fear the stranger? As the Bible says: You shall also love the stranger, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt.’ (Deuteronomy 10.19).

And so Christianity and Islam, the two most widespread religions in the world, should be at the forefront of opposing all xenophobia. But this is often not the case. Often we are engaged in violence towards strangers and people of other beliefs.

This is not because religion is violent, but because a particular characteristic of modernity, the rise of fundamentalism, the desire to embrace simplistic, one dimensional understandings of the world. The earliest form was scientific fundamentalism, the idea that science is the only door to truth. There is market fundamentalism, which asserts that everything can be explained in terms of ‘the invisible hand’ of the market. There is nationalistic fundamentalism and, of course, religious fundamentalism, which claims that our faith can be reduced to a simplistic, literalistic reading of our sacred texts. Religion is not the source of the violence, but the infection of religion with fundamentalism, which is contrary to all true religion.

And so in this time of rising fear and violence Christians and Muslims together must reclaim our ancient inheritance and welcome the stranger, not because we are the same as each other, but because difference is enriching. Bishop Pierre Claverie, the Catholic bishop of Oran, in Algeria, loved Islam because it was different and so had something to teach Christians. He said, ‘I not only accept that the Other is Other, a distinct subject with freedom of conscience,

but I accept that he or she may possess a part of the truth that I do not have, and without which my own search for truth cannot be fully realised.²⁹ (Translators see the French below) He was murdered for his love of dialogue. His funeral was attended by hundreds of Muslims. So, faced with the rise of populism and xenophobia, Christianity and Islam have a vital contribution to make: the embrace of the stranger in his or her difference.

What does this say about citizenship, a particular concern of today's conference? Allow me to answer from my Christian tradition. According to the thirteenth century Dominican, St Thomas Aquinas, the State is most truly itself when it recognises its own limitations. No state can claim the absolute loyalty of its citizens. That would be another form of fundamentalism. It must protect the rights of citizens to live by other deeper loyalties, often religious, as long as they do not harm the common good of all. The former Archbishop of Canterbury, Rowan Williams, said 'The citizen is not only a citizen, but someone whose belonging is fleshed out by other loyalties.' This was the witness of the great German Lutheran theologian Dietrich Bonhoeffer in his opposition to Nazism, which led to his execution.

So at this tense moment in history, Christianity and Islam should stand together in protecting the freedom of conscience of minorities, religious and political, provided that they do not threaten the public good. The healthy society gives us the space to debate our differences, so that we may help each other in the search for truth. Archbishop Williams again: 'a good democracy is an argumentative democracy.'

In recent years, there is increasing talk of the 'will of the people'. In Europe in the 1930s this populism quickly became oppressive and monolithic. Minorities were crushed in the name of 'the people'. All the great religions can unite in the protection of the dignity of each human being in his or her pursuit of the truth. The stranger is not to be feared.

29. Jean-Jacques Pérennès OP, *A Life Poured Out: Pierre Claverie of Algeria*, Orbis, New York, 2007, p.148. This is a translation of *Pierre Claverie: Un Algérien par alliance*, Le Cerf, Paris, 2000, p.221 : 'Non seulement j'admets que l'autre est autre, sujet dans sa différence, libre dans sa conscience, mais j'accepte qu'il peut détenir une part de la vérité qui me manque et sans laquelle ma propre quête de vérité ne peut aboutir totalement.'

Panellist Statement

Professor Carole Hillenbrand

Professor of Islamic History, University of St. Andrews

Any discussion of the interaction between Islam and Christianity needs to be conducted within the framework of religious beliefs and traditions deeply embedded in both cultures since ancient times. Of course, there are many millions of people worldwide who profess no faith at all, but that does not make them immune from the effects of religious belief, whether in the high-profile terrorism that grabs the headlines or, more subtly, in the way that everyday society works. Believers and non-believers alike share the same living and working spaces. They do not have the option of switching off from the concerns of their neighbours. No man is an island. So, this concerns us all, and all the time.

In this talk I want to deal in turn with three topics: first, the urgent need to create common ground between Christians and Muslims; second, how to deal with Islamophobia and Christianophobia; and third, the specific long-term aims which should underlie any concerted policy to deal with these phobias and the problems they cause.

First, then, creating common ground. Let us remind ourselves that what Muslims and Christians share is much more than what divides them. Both groups believe in the One God, and that really matters in a rampantly secular world. They have much scripture in common and they share deep spiritual truths about this life and the hereafter. All this matters more than the details of dogma. We must respect each other's beliefs, rituals and festivals and be ready to learn more about each other. Knowledge, tolerance and good will must be the weapons to overcome the ignorance and prejudice peddled by the media and the internet.

How to proceed, you may ask. School curricula should introduce children to the major faiths from year one, raising awareness of other faiths, their rituals and festivals. Local authorities and charities should support adult education classes tackling key everyday practices such as prayer, charitable giving, fasting, veiling, food and drink, and fostering ethical standards. Let children see worship in action in mosques and churches. Celebrate how differences within these living faiths express diversity and pluralism: they are neither monolithic nor unchanging. Encourage more awareness of the differences between unchanging religious dogma and changing social customs, often of local origins, that masquerade as faith. Acknowledge that some customs, such as the segregation of girls from boys in school activities, or veiling, may

have implications, whether these are social or security-related. Explain the hijacking of religious faith and practice by terrorists, whether these are Muslim (e.g. ISIL) or Christian (e.g. the IRA). This is a burning issue worldwide and demands much more public debate than it has received. It is a growing problem which is spreading its tentacles throughout Europe, Asia and Africa. It will not be ignored but it is frequently misrepresented.

Second, how should we deal with a fear of the other religion and its adherents? Greater reciprocal understanding is the key. It would be good to confront jointly the difficult legacies of the past, beginning with some ancient enmities – the Arab Muslim conquests and then the Crusades. The destructive impact of Western colonialism and interference in the Islamic world during the past two hundred years or so must be fully acknowledged. And to counterbalance these sad memories, we should give due weight to the profound, extensive cultural and scientific interplay between Islam and Christianity over the centuries, a process which has incalculably enriched both sides. Increasing globalization lends a new urgency to fostering this better understanding, for we see now a seismic movement of peoples in response to political and economic catastrophes across much of the planet. That breaks down borders and cultural barriers between peoples and races, so we all have to learn to live peacefully with each other. And such migrations have been a constant of history for millennia.

We need to tackle in particular the religious dimensions of these problems. Such action could take many forms. One is to marshal UN support to combat the persecution of Muslims by Christians and that of Christians by Muslims. Another is to launch, at national and international level, more inter-faith programmes. A third is to harness the power of the media to publicise - in the press, on radio, on TV and in films - the positive aspects of each culture rather than the problems often associated with it. And yet more is needed. The silent majority must speak up, first at local, then at national and finally at international level. The voices of hostility and extremism have had it their own way for too long. Let us beware of the danger of scapegoating entire communities for the wrongdoing of a few of their members. We must pinpoint the trouble spots, whether in specific locations or over particular issues, where Islamophobia and Christianophobia have flourished in the past and are likely to break out in the future. Above all, we must proclaim that both Christian and Muslim beliefs are in accord with democratic principles and that both faiths share a similar ethical stance.

Thirdly, let me finally make a series of practical suggestions as to what long-term aims should underpin the ongoing development of Muslim-Christian

relations. Where either faith is practised by a minority, its political rights should be reflected in the structure of government itself, in proportion to the size of that minority. At the highest level, Lebanon offers a well-trying model. Or take Cyprus: current proposals for the 1 in 5 Turkish minority include the suggestion that every fifth year the presidency would be filled by a Turkish Cypriot. Representation in Parliament and, below that, in local government, should operate in a similar way. Similarly, in the civil sector proportional representation should be the norm. The professions at large (civil service, armed forces, police, education, health services, the law, and so on) should operate a minimum recruitment quota from minorities, again calibrated according to the size of a given minority. No profession should be closed to minorities.

There is one obvious exception to this principle, and it concerns people employed in the church and mosque sectors. Those legal matters that concern certain specific religious issues should be the responsibility of Christian courts in Muslim-majority lands and *Shari'a* courts in the West. A useful parallel is provided by the Beit Din Jewish courts in the UK. But it should be stressed that in general the law of the land should take precedence over religious law. In all such matters, freedom of worship and of religious practice should be specifically acknowledged as an inalienable principle.

A crucial long-term aim must be to improve the position of women in social, economic and religious terms. It is often overlooked that both Christian and Muslim ideals and scriptural texts proclaim similar messages in this matter. It is important to recognize, and not to minimize, the prevalence of gender stereotyping and discrimination. The underlying aim must be to foster gender equality and gender empowerment across the world as a basic human right.

In sum, then, the social and political grievances of minorities must be acknowledged and studied in depth as a prelude for finding solutions for them. And so it is high time to develop a sophisticated and coordinated response to the issues detailed above.

The problems I have outlined in this talk have been with us for a long time and their destructive impact on societies across the globe have long been recognized by thinking, caring people. They foster hostility, suspicion, distrust; they block progress; and they threaten the rights of minorities and the disadvantaged. It is not an option simply to wish them away. No. It is time to tackle them head-on. The proposed World Conference will, we may hope, provide an instrument for Islam and Christianity to work together to secure equal citizenship for all. With goodwill, resolve and a spirit of cooperation, we *can* make a better world.

Professor Carole Hillenbrand, Ph. D, O.B.E., F.B.A., F.R.S.E., F.R.Hist.Soc.,

Professor of Islamic History, Universities of Edinburgh and St Andrews,

Winner of the King Faisal Prize for Islamic Studies, 2005 (the first non-Muslim and the first woman to be awarded this prize)

Winner of the Naef al-Rodhan/British Academy prize for Transcultural Understanding, 2016

Statement during Interactive Session

Ambassador Najla Riachi Assaker

Permanent Representative of the Lebanese Republic to the United Nations and Other International Organization in Geneva

Since I am taking the floor for the first time today, I would like to thank The Geneva Center for Human Rights Advancement and Global Dialogue for taking the initiative of organizing this very special side event, as well as the Permanent Mission of Algeria and the Permanent Observer Mission of the Order of Malta, for granting their sponsorship to it.

The presence of the Permanent Mission of Lebanon among the co-sponsors of a side event on “the Great convergence between Islam and Christianity” is more than natural, for what our country represents in terms of religious diversity and Freedom of Religion and Belief, with its very special social fabric and its 18 different religious communities that have been coexisting there for many centuries.

As you all may already know, the whole historic and constitutional construction of the State of Lebanon is based on the Freedom of Religion and Belief, as well as on the Freedom of practicing all religious rites, and those rights are enshrined in its Constitution, since the establishment of the Lebanese State, and despite all the developments that took place throughout the past 70 years.

The Lebanese Constitution goes even further by providing the equality and Rights and Duties for all the citizens, without any discrimination or preference, and tends to establish a general balance among the major religious groups.

This unique tradition of religious diversity and coexistence, in particular in the Middle East region, is constantly praised by all the people who visit Lebanon and get to know it closely. In this regard, I would like to draw your attention to the informative report that was issued in November 2015, by the United Nations Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Religion or Belief Professor Heiner Bielefeldt.

Of course, we are all aware of the various complicated, very complex and sometimes violent episodes that Lebanon had already been through, and during which the peaceful coexistence between different religious communities was seriously at stake. But in spite of all the vicissitudes, Lebanon is reconfirmed in its special role as a positive example, and is fully willing to play it again.

Today more than ever, since Lebanon is facing the unprecedented turmoil in the Middle East, with all the violent conflicts that are taking place in the region, it is

actively resisting against the spiraling religious extremism that is surrounding it.

I can also go further by saying that our country can propose positive examples for its neighborhood, where the existence of States with societies that are as complex and diverse, is today deeply threatened. *“In fact, Lebanon could be the ray of hope in the region and beyond, for as long as it preserves and promotes its legacy of religious diversity,”* and here I am quoting the Special Rapporteur Professor Heiner Bielefeldt.

But how Lebanon can do this? In order to answer your question, I will try to propose some of our tips hereafter.

1. In Lebanon, the model of people living peacefully together in a common citizenship is not only an idealistic slogan, but it is a vital experience in everyday's life. Whatever their religious community is, the Lebanese citizens share the same concerns, the same hopes and the same fears. They also share common social, economic and political interests, which can easily create strong bonds. Therefore, they all constantly live in a permanent state of cooperation and interaction, which implies a continuous dialogue. Today, there is a broad consensus among the Lebanese, that this social structure is the main asset for the country, and that it should be preserved by all means.
2. The Lebanese cultural scene is being more and more famous for its efforts aiming at promoting interreligious communication, in multiple national and institutionalized fora, such as the *“Christian-Muslim Committee for Dialogue,”* where religious leaders and dignitaries, alongside with other laic interlocutors, get involved in an active dialogue. Within such frameworks, many inter-religious activities are regularly organized, such as regular Christian-Muslim Spiritual Summits, as well as high-profile cultural events...
3. In parallel, other inter-faith initiatives pursue a different approach by giving a leading role to more ordinary members of the different Christian and Muslim Communities, such as the *“Lebanese Foundation for Interfaith Studies and Spiritual Solidarity”* (ADYAN). This Foundation as well as other institutions with the same spirit: they work on building coexistence in pluralistic societies, they always to highlight diversity as an added value, they develop trust and social solidarity, they enable people to discover common values and interests, they provide help to people in need, regardless of their religious affiliations.

4. Here, it is crucial to highlight the very precious role that the Lebanese civil society, that has always been extremely responsible and dynamic, has been able to play in broadening the common public space where people can cooperate on all relevant issues, across their diverse religious backgrounds.
5. One more element that Lebanon has been experiencing is its special constitutional and political system that is based on a broad consensus among different communities, and on the sharing of all levels of power. This political system is not always well understood by external observers who usually tend to only see its negatives implications. But it can also lead to the building of more trust, on the basis of mutual respect of each community's vital interests, and on the condition of respecting religious sensitivities and avoiding unnecessary provocations.

I have tried to answer your questions by giving you a few tips of how Lebanon can serve as a role model for other societies seeking to enhance interreligious relations between Christians and Muslims. Of course, I don't pretend my answer to be holistic, since I can talk about the Lebanese special case for ages, and keep discovering new ideas or trends. However, my last message would be that Lebanon, or any other similar country should remain vigilant and preserve its religious diversity, by protecting it, developing it, broadening it, strengthening it and promoting it, through a suitable education for the young generations, and more specifically through a proper history teaching and a constant "*mémorialisation*" process, since such a precious heritage should never be taken for granted.

Statement during Interactive Session

Dr. Alfred de Zayas

United Nations Independent Expert on the Promotion of a Democratic and Equitable International Order

First let me congratulate you for this fine conference. I have gained insights that I intend to incorporate into my future reports.

As you know, it is estimated that there are approximately 1.6 billion Muslims and 2.2 billion Christians in the world, making out more than half the population of our Planet. As such we have a joint responsibility to put our values into practice so as to advance world peace and human rights, not only for believers but also for non-believers.

We share a belief that we were created by a loving God that gave us not only life but also values that we cherish, values that give us meaning and *raison d'être*. As members of monotheistic religions our Credo is an optimistic belief in the goodness of God, the goodness of the human being, the blessing of forgiveness, the miracle of existence and resurrection.

St. Francis of Assisi in his *Laudes Creaturarum* chanted: “*Be praised, my Lord, through all your creatures.*” The Islamic philosopher Ibn Rushd, who wrote brilliant treatises on Aristotle, also engaged in literary criticism, holding that a poem of praise should convey a universal representation of virtue that will arouse the soul’s imagination yearning, enthusiasm, and empathy. Hence, both religion and literature demonstrate the commonalities of the human family and their potential to promote convergence and social justice.

Pope Francis is an advocate of the convergence of religious values and warns against labelling and stereotyping. In particular, he rejects the tendency of some politicians and media to generalize and identify Islam with violence. In 2016 Francis said “*If I speak of Islamic violence, I have to speak of Catholic violence... terrorism grows when there is no other option and when money is made a god... That is the first form of terrorism.*” Francis recalls his conversation with the Grand Iman of the Al-Azhar University in Cairo and their common commitment to peace and encounter. In looking for the root causes of fundamentalism Francis asks, “*how many young people in Europe -- whom we have left empty of ideals, who do not have work – how many take drugs, alcohol or go to enlist in fundamentalist groups?*” A possible solution entails social education to instil in young people the positive values of religion, brotherhood and solidarity. Far from calling for violence, religion calls for tolerance. But

those who are bereft of ideals can fall into the trap of pseudo-religious fanatics, who subvert and transform the Gospel of peace into one of violence.

The Christian and Muslim religions aim at seeking and giving meaning and purpose to life. Both the Christian Bible and the Muslim Quran and Hadiths give guidance for a virtuous and productive existence on the Planet, which is the common heritage of mankind. We have a duty to past, present and future generations to preserve this treasure that has been only temporarily entrusted to us. We do not own the universe. We are part of it. We all strive for happiness in our families and communities. What is necessary is to abandon materialism and to cultivate our spirituality, so as to find harmony first with ourselves and then with our neighbours. Religion teaches us to cultivate mutual respect and live according to the rules of charity and solidarity. In this spirit we can achieve -- together -- an international order based on the inalienable dignity of the human person.

This human dignity -- the source of all human rights -- is universal, and the norms that have been codified to promote and protect human rights are interrelated and interdependent. Christians have no reason to fear Muslims, as Muslims have no reason to fear Christians. Our commonalities surpass our differences. But we do not know enough about each other and thus it is necessary to promote enhanced cultural exchanges between Christians and Muslims.

A major obstacle to achieving a democratic and equitable international order is materialism. Hence the great world religions have a responsibility to reaffirm spiritual values and to educate future generations in the true place of the human being in the universe as a free agent endowed by God with dignity and identity, as a member of society with both rights and responsibilities. The human person is more than a number, a robot, a commodity, a consumer: He has a soul that should be nourished and a conscience that should be tested with self-criticism and intellectual honesty.

We must reject the absurd idea of a “*clash of civilizations*” that would see Christians and Muslims slaughter each other. To counter this mantra of propaganda we must reach out to each other, lest the terror-mongering chimera become a self-fulfilling prophecy. Propaganda for war is specifically prohibited in article 20, paragraph 1, of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. Too many armed conflicts have resulted from unjustified fear of the other. Why is it then that when we see people we do not know, we often perceive them as potential competitors or even enemies, instead of welcoming them as potential friends and partners? Of course, there are differences among us,

often differences that enrich us, but the convergence of our human values, our capacity for empathy and cooperation, our consciousness of equal citizenship are greater.

As some of you may know, I have been President of the PEN Club in “*Suisse romand*” for seven years and our Charter stipulates: “*Members of PEN should at all times use what influence they have in favour of good understanding and mutual respect between nations; they pledge themselves to do their utmost to dispel race, class and national hatreds, and to champion the ideal of one humanity living in peace in one world.*” Accordingly, we writers also share the noble goals of this conference.

The convergence of world religions and world literature, the joint venture to reach out to each other, will yet deliver peace and progress for future generations.

I thank you.

ANNEX II
MEDIA COVERAGE

‘Religious Discrimination, Fanaticism and Xenophobia Worsened’



Source: Inter Press Service

<http://www.ipsnews.net/2017/03/religious-discrimination-fanaticism-and-xenophobia-worsened/>

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‘Religious Discrimination, Fanaticism and Xenophobia Worsened’

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Islam and Christianity

The Great Convergence:
Working jointly towards equal citizenship rights

Wednesday 15th March 2017
from 15:00 to 17:30
Palais des Nations, Room XIX

- Moderator
H.E. Mr. Jassir Jassir,
Executive Director of the Geneva Centre
- Opening Remarks
H.E. Dr. Hanif Hassan Ali Al Qasbi,
Chairman of the Geneva Centre's Board of Management
- Panelists
H.E. Ambassador Marie-Thérèse Pictet-Althann,
Permanent Observer of the Sovereign Order of Malta to the UN
H.E. Sheikh Lubna Khaid Al Qasbi,
President of the Islamic Foundation of the UK
Reverend Dr. Olav Fykse Tveit,
General Secretary, World Council of Churches (WCC)
H.E. Minister Lakhdar Brahimi,
Former Minister of Foreign Affairs of Algeria and a member of the
Olema, a group of eminent global leaders
H.E. Minister Jarek Mitro,
Former Acting Minister of Foreign Affairs of Lithuania, Director of the
European Forum Institute for Public Policy and International Affairs (EPI)
H.E. Ambassador Mark D. Sillander

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Credit: Geneva Centre for Human Rights Advancement and Global Dialogue

ROME/GENEVA, Mar 18 2017 (IPS) - Religious discrimination, fanaticism and xenophobia have worsened in several countries in Europe, Asia, Africa, the Middle East and North America, thus there is a need for alternatives to identify a common strategy to address these challenges, a Geneva-based think tank promoting global dialogue stated.

The issue has been top on the agenda of a meeting organised by the Geneva Centre for Human Rights Advancement and Global Dialogue on Mar. 16 at the United Nations Office in Geneva, during which representatives from the Muslim and Christian regions of the world exchanged views on the convergence between Islam and Christianity.

William Lacy Swing, Director General of the International Organization for Migration (IOM) who participated in this meeting, entitled "Islam and Christianity, the Great Convergence: Working Jointly Towards Equal Citizenship Rights, highlighted the importance of recognising the convergences of the Abrahamic religions – Islam and Christianity – in order to overcome religious divisions.

"We live today in turbulent and troubled times. There are many and loud voices that take perverse delight in drawing attention to what divides and splits our global community. In these circumstances, it is all too easy to forget that Islam and Christianity – two of the world's three ancient Abrahamic monotheist religious traditions – have more in common than in contention."

Prince Hassan bin Talal of Jordan underlined in a video message the importance of fostering religious tolerance and inter-faith harmony between Christians and Muslims as well as intra-faith cohesion.

Referring to the Brussels Declaration entitled "The Peace of God in the World" Towards Peaceful Coexistence and Collaboration Among the Three Monotheistic Religions: Judaism, Christianity, and Islam", he underscored the importance of bringing peace to the world and the need for peaceful co-existence between religious groups.

"All of our religions disapprove of religious justification of violence and inhumane actions, none of them approve of violence, terrorism or ill treatment of human beings," he said.

For his part, the Chairman of the Geneva Centre Dr. Hanif Hassan Ali Al Qassim highlighted the significance of garnering the support of Muslim and Christian leaders to restore relations between Islam and Christianity.

"Today we have a tremendous opportunity to discuss the convergences between Islam and Christianity and to continue our joint efforts combining our strengths to promote equal citizenship rights," he added.

The Minister of State for Tolerance of the United Arab Emirates, Sheikhha Lubna Khalid al Qasimi, for her part emphasised the need for Christian-Muslim dialogue as a necessary condition for peace, tolerance and harmony.

"Irrespective of national identity, all citizens need to be granted equally universal human rights. Our states need to protect these human rights. To grant equal protection, we need to rethink our Christian-Muslim dialogue. It is only through engaging in dialogue and accepting the diversity of each other that we can reach a peaceful reconciliation."

Representing over 500 million Christians in more than 120 countries of the world, the General Secretary of the World Council of Churches, Reverend Dr. Olav Fykse Tveit said, "that the nature of the relationship between these two faith communities is of vital significance for the welfare of the whole human family."

For his part, the former Minister of Foreign Affairs of Algeria, Lakhdar Brahimi, condemned the hijacking of religious faiths by violent and extremist groups stating that the "majority of people in the so-called Muslim majority countries are horrified by the barbaric violence committed by groups who claim to serve Islam."

"Daesh, Al-Qaeda, Boko-Haram and similar groups in our countries and in Europe are abusing Islam and gravely trying to destroy its values, its cultures and its civilisation."

Equal, Inclusive Citizenship Rights

As part of the meeting's agenda, the Executive Director of the Geneva Centre Idriss Jazairy presented a draft agenda for a forthcoming world conference entitled 'Religions, Creeds or Other Value Systems and Equal Citizenship Rights' that will build on the discussions initiated during the meeting.

The goal of this conference would be to initiate a structured dialogue that might lead to the obsolescence of the concept of minority and to its replacement by that of a model of inclusive and equal citizenship rights.

On the conference, the Former Acting Foreign Minister of Lebanon and the current Director of the Issam Fares Institute for Public Policy and International Affairs in Beirut, Dr. Tarek Mitri, argued that states should be established on the principles of citizenship, equality and law to create an environment of plurality and tolerance.

"Re-vitalising the pact of citizenship necessitates the rebuilding of state institutions on the foundation of the rule of law. The state's chief obligation is to protect its citizens, all its citizens. Politics of inclusion in fractured societies are a condition for equal citizenship," he said.

The former US ambassador to the United Nations and former member of the US Congress, Dr. Mark D. Siljander, ascertained that the convergence and the commonalities between the Abrahamic faiths of Islam and Christianity could lead to equal and inclusive citizenship rights. Drawing on his long-time expertise as a diplomat and peacemaker.

And Pakistan's ambassador Tehmina Janjua reminded the participants that the concept of equal and inclusive citizenship should go beyond religious affiliation.

"If we are to address the issue of citizenship rights/minorities globally, then we need to go beyond the relationship of Christianity and Islam. We also need to go beyond viewing this issue from the perspective of religion alone."

The goal of the Geneva Centre's initiative was to highlight the many convergences that exist between Islam and Christianity, to recognise the potential of a "great convergence" between both religions, and to mitigate and reverse the social polarisation between affiliates of these two religions and the resulting marginalisation of religious minorities, discrimination, xenophobia and violence.

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Islam and Christianity the Great Convergence: Working jointly towards equal citizenship rights



Source: Inter Press Service

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Islam and Christianity the Great Convergence: Working jointly towards equal citizenship rights

By His Royal Highness Prince Hassan bin Talal

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Mar 15 2017 (Geneva Centre) - Message of His Royal Highness Prince Hassan bin Talal of the Hachemite Kingdom of Jordan

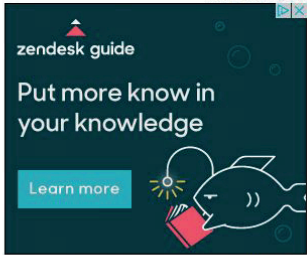


Islam and Christianity - the Great Convergence: Working jointly towards equal citizenship rights
 from IPS News

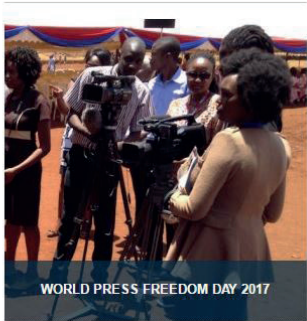
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Dear friends, distinguished participants,

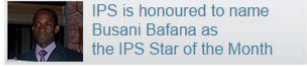
The peace of God in the world, as it was put in the Brussels Declaration, is essentially what we seek when we speak about the participation of human capital: it is not only the peace of God, but it is also the peace of God's children that we attempt to build, by speaking of a "levelling", that is to say, of universal citizenship with universal values shared by all. Let us look at those values for a moment.



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The fundamental common element about monotheistic religions is faith and confidence in the good, human-loving, compassionate, and merciful God. All of our religions, Judaism, Christianity, Islam consider justice and peace as gifts and blessings from God. All of our religions disapprove of religious justification of violence and inhumane actions, none of them approve of violence, terrorism or ill treatment of human beings. The Brussels Declaration unfortunately has not been heeded and that is why we are meeting here today, to say once again, in the spirit of Judaism, *"What is hateful to you do not do to your fellow man – this is the entire law, all the rest is commentary."* Christianity has the tradition of *"all things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them for this is the law of the Prophet."*

In this context I would like to emphasize the importance of Islam as the third and youngest of the Abrahamic family of faiths, embodying ethical codes to which both Jews and Christians and likewise subscribe in spirit. The Holy Qur'an and the Prophet's hadiths are clear in the regulation of human relations and reciprocal responsibilities. When asked, the Holy Prophet is quoted in saying *"What is the rule of Islam? What is the best thing in Islam? And the answer was: to feed the hungry, to give the greeting of peace both to those one knows and to those one does not know."*

Why are we going to emphasize the levelling of citizenship? I would suggest that for education to stand a realistic chance of achieving its desired goals of ultimately fostering better relations and enlightened outreach among faith groups, Jewish, Christian and Muslim, the oft espoused theory that mutual knowledge cures all, is clearly not enough; that to know is to love, mutual awareness and knowledge is what we would dearly promote were it not for the confrontation among co-religionists and co-nationalists. Incidentally, I believe in patriotism – loving your country; but nationalism as in loving your country at the expense of another, is what has happened in the Caucasus for instance, when Christian Russia backed Muslim Abkhazia against Christian Georgia, when Muslim Iran played off Christian Armenia against Muslim Azerbaijan. The list continues as you all well know, Ossetians against Georgians, both Christians, Lezgins against Azeri, both Muslim and so forth. My question to you and to myself is: do we not need to highlight the twin poles of the problem, the problem of us and the Other? What about these conflicts? Where are the lines of antagonism? Do they not always correspond to religious divisions? Is there an imperative of conducting not only interfaith, but also intra-faith discourse? I would suggest that citizenship is about values that apply not to, with all the respect, brand names, but apply to promoting creative commons, based on shared values.


And in that sense, I do wish that such an initiative today could lead somewhere down the road – next year is one hundred years since Versailles: can you imagine a Versailles in 2018 that emphasizes the importance of a survey of our sources, for any chosen time period, of literature, fiction and nonfiction, mass communication, textbooks – of course, today we have civil society actively tweeting. Is there a knowledge base, a compassion of knowledge base for such tweets? Can we create a knowledge base and analyse it through regional symposia? Can we move in terms of a new twin pole, and that is not the binary twin pole, but the regional, greater good of the greater number, between West and East? We have this monolith, and I think the time has come to speak about North and South. From the Baltic to the Black Sea, from the Black Sea to the Levant, the Eastern Mediterranean, the Adriatic, all of this constitutes the cradle of civilization, and of course the relationship between the haves and the have-nots, the black and the green, the hydrocarbons and the fertile crescent. In this spirit, I salute you and look forward to your recommendations.

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Violence, Power Vacuum in Mideast, Fertile Ground for Terrorism



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Violence, Power Vacuum in Mideast, Fertile Ground for Terrorism

By IPS World Desk

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Credit: Geneva Centre for Human Rights Advancement and Global Dialogue

ROME/GENEVA, Mar 13 2017 (IPS) - Long decades of violence in the Middle East and Northern Africa, resulting from the proliferation of international and local conflicts, have strained the social fabric that once held peaceful Arab societies together, says a Geneva-based think tank promoting global dialogue.

The resulting power vacuum has provided fertile ground for the emergence of terrorists group advocating a distorted view of Islam in an attempt to access power through violence exercised against Muslims, Christians and other religious minorities, adds the Geneva Centre for Human Rights Advancement and Global Dialogue (GCHRADG).

"This situation has had a spill-over effect affecting also the West and other regions in which the disruptive effects of globalisation, and the growing disengagement of political elites from the concerns of ordinary people, have given rise to a populist tidal wave."

According to the GCHRADG, the emerging populism has a strong xenophobic component. Societies are prey to the growing polarisation created through manipulation of religions and beliefs.

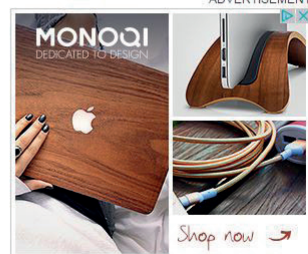
"The rise of far-right populist movements goes hand in hand with the political instrumentalisation of religions, which exacerbates divisions and incites hatred and violence. While Islam and Christianity are vectors of peace, their malevolent manipulation seeks to accentuate alleged differences and depict them as incompatible and opposed to one another."

The Geneva Centre has repeatedly consistently addressed issues related to the rise of xenophobia, extremist violence, racism and discrimination with various partners.

This way, it organised, in 2016, a series of conferences on themes related to "Islamophobia and the Implementation of UN Human Rights Council Resolution 16/18: Reaching Out"; "De-radicalization or the Roll-Back of Violent Extremism"; and "Muslims in Europe: The Road to Social Harmony".

Notwithstanding the relevance of the topics, some participants pointed out to the Geneva Centre the necessity of broadening the debate to not only include Muslim minorities in Europe, but also to take into account

"The disruptive effects of globalisation, and the growing disengagement of political elites from the concerns of ordinary people, have given rise to a populist tidal wave" – The Geneva Centre



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other religious minorities affected by the current environment of tension and incitement to hatred.

In this regard, the GCHRADG has planned to organise a side-event on the theme of "Islam and Christianity, the Great Convergence: Working jointly towards equal citizenship rights", scheduled for 15 March, in relation to the 34th ordinary session of the UN Human Rights Council.

Islam and Christianity
The Great Convergence:
Working jointly towards
equal citizenship rights

Wednesday 15th March 2017
from 15.00 to 17.30
Palais des Nations,
Room XIX

- Moderator:
H.E. Mr. Idriss Jazairy,
Executive Director of the Geneva Centre
- Opening Remarks:
H.E. Dr. Hanif Hassan Ali Al Qassim,
Chairman of the Geneva Centre's Board of Management
- Panellists:
H.E. Ambassador Marie-Thérèse Pictet-Althann,
Permanent Observer of the Sovereign Order of Malta to the UN
H.E. Sheikh Lubna Khalid Al Qasbi,
Minister of State for Tolerance of UAE
Reverend Dr. Olav Fykse Tveit,
General Secretary, World Council of Churches (WCC)
H.E. Minister Lakhdar Brahimi,
Former Minister of Foreign Affairs of Algeria and a member of the
Lithers - a group of eminent global leaders
H.E. Minister Tarek Mitri,
Former Acting Minister of Foreign Affairs of Lebanon, Director of the
Islamic Forum Institute for Public Policy and International Affairs (IFI)
H.E. Ambassador Mark D. Siljander

Credit: Geneva Centre for Human Rights Advancement and Global Dialogue

The objective will be to study the "alternatives to identify a common strategy that addresses the issues of religious discrimination, fanaticism and xenophobia," which have worsened in several countries in Europe, Asia, Africa, the Middle East and North America.

According to the organisers, the goal will be to highlight the many convergences that exist between Islam and Christianity, to recognise the potential of a "great convergence" between both religions, and to mitigate and to reduce the marginalisation of religious minorities, discrimination, xenophobia and the resulting violence.

This debate could then be the starting point for a larger conference, which identifies common commitments to dialogue, tolerance and non-discrimination, announce the organisers.

According to the Geneva Centre, "some high-level politicians are trying to oppose Islam and Christianity and express concerns about the plight of minorities affiliated to particular religions."

The planned initiative aims at restoring globally to the debate taking into account the need to empower all minorities so that the very notion of minorities ends up dissolving into the broader and more inclusive concept of equal citizenship rights.

"It is fortunate that this agenda is bringing together some of the most senior representatives of the body politics, the religious leaders and academics from the Christian and the Muslim regions alike."

GCHRADG is an independent, non-profit, non-governmental organization dedicated to the advancement of human rights through consultation and training with youth, civil society and governments.

In addition to the Geneva Centre's chairman Hanif Ali Al Qassim, and executive director, Idriss Jazairy, the panel will bring together Sheikh Lubna Khalid Al Qasbi, minister of State for Tolerance of United Arab Emirates; Reverend Dr. Olav Fykse Tveit, General Secretary, World Council of Churches, and Lakhdar Brahimi, former Minister of Foreign Affairs of Algeria.

Also participating Tarek Mitri, former acting minister of Foreign Affairs of Lebanon; ambassador Mark D. Siljander, former U.S. Congressman; Reverend Timothy Radcliffe, Dominican friar of the English Province, and former Master of the Order of Preachers (commonly known as the Dominicans); Ambassador Marie-Thérèse Pictet-Althann, Permanent Observer of the Sovereign Order of Malta to the UN, and professor Carole Hillenbrand, Professor of Islamic History, University of St. Andrews.

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UAE urges utmost respect for human rights



Source: Gulf News

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UAE urges utmost respect for human rights

Lubna highlights need for Christian-Muslim dialogue to promote peace, tolerance and harmony

Published: 16:07 March 19, 2017
Staff Report

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Geneva: Irrespective of national identity, all people must be assured equal protection of their universal human rights, said Shaikha Lubna Al Qasimi, Minister of State for Tolerance.

Addressing an event held by the Geneva Centre for Human Rights Advancement and Global Dialogue (The Geneva Centre) at the United Nations Office in Geneva (UNOG) on the sidelines of the 34th ordinary session of the UN Human Rights Council, Shaikha Lubna emphasised the need for Christian-Muslim dialogue as a necessary condition for peace, tolerance and harmony.

She added, "Our states need to protect these human rights. To grant equal protection, we need to rethink our Christian-Muslim dialogue. It is only through engaging in dialogue and accepting the diversity of each other that we can reach a peaceful reconciliation."

The event was attended by representatives from Muslim and Christian regions of the world who were invited to exchange their views on the convergence between Islam and Christianity.

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In his opening remarks, Dr Hanif Hassan Ali Al Qasim, chairman of the Geneva Centre, underscored the significance of garnering the support of Muslim and Christian leaders to restore relations between the two faiths.



"Today we have a tremendous opportunity to discuss the convergences between Islam and Christianity and to continue our joint efforts combining our strengths to promote equal citizenship rights," he added.

Representing over 500 million Christians in more than 110 countries of the world, the general secretary of the World Council of Churches (WCC), Reverend Dr Olav Fykse Tveit, observed that the nature of the relationship between the Islamic and Christian communities is of vital significance for the welfare of the "whole human family".

The event entitled 'Islam and Christianity, the Great Convergence: Working Jointly Towards Equal Citizenship Rights' was co-sponsored by the Permanent Missions of Algeria, Pakistan and Lebanon, as well as the Permanent Observer Mission of the Sovereign Order of Malta to the United Nations Office in Geneva (UNOG) that were represented by their respective ambassadors.

Also present at the side event was the director general of the International Organisation for Migration (IOM), William Lacy Swing, who highlighted the importance of recognising the convergences of the Abrahamic religions — Islam and Christianity — in order to overcome religious divisions.

Islam dan Kristiani Mencari Kesamaan tentang Kewarganegaraan

Source: Satu Harapan

<http://www.satuharapan.com/read-detail/read/islam-dan-kristiani-mencari-kesamaan-tentang-kewarganegaraan>



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Islam dan Kristiani Mencari Kesamaan tentang Kewarganegaraan



Suasana dialog yang bertema "Islam And Christianity, The Great Convergence : Working Jointly Towards Equal Citizenship Rights". (Foto: oikoumene.org)

JENEWA, SATUHARAPAN.COM – Pada pertengahan pekan ini, Rabu (15/3) di kantor Perserikatan Bangsa-Bangsa (PBB) di Jenewa, Swiss diselenggarakan dialog yang bertema "Islam And

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Christianity, The Great Convergence : Working Jointly Towards Equal Citizenship Rights" atau "Islam dan Kristen, Konvergensi Besar : Bekerja Sama Guna Mendapat Hak-hak Kewarganegaraan."

Menurut *oikoumene.org*, hari Kamis (16/3), acara tersebut merupakan bagian dari sidang ke-34 dari Dewan Hak Asasi Manusia.

Dalam kesempatan tersebut, Sekretaris Jenderal World Council of Churches (WCC) atau Dewan Gereja Dunia, Sekjen Olav Fykse Tveit mengatakan tujuan diselenggarakannya dialog tersebut adalah menyoroti kesamaan yang ada antara Islam dan Kristiani, dan dalam kaitannya dengan berbagai pertanyaan yang muncul tentang kewarganegaraan, terutama di negara-negara mayoritas Muslim.

"Kesetaraan kewarganegaraan bagi umat Islam dan Kristen adalah bagian dari proses perdamaian untuk kemanusiaan," kata Tveit.

Tveit mengatakan sepuluh pemateri membahas kemungkinan sebuah kesamaan yang besar antara dua agama ini yang berkomitmen untuk perdamaian namun terkadang masih sulit terlaksana, dan masih terdapat banyak kesalahpahaman, perselisihan dan bahkan perang.

Setiap panelis memberi gambaran terkini singkat tentang situasi di negaranya masing-masing tentang kekerasan terhadap umat Muslim dan Kristen.

Banyak pidato difokuskan pada pentingnya menekankan kesamaan dua agama ini yakni satu Tuhan, pertumbuhan rohani, penghormatan terhadap perbedaan, namun para pemateri juga mencatat bahwa beberapa komunitas agama masih menghadapi diskriminasi.

Biarawan asal Dominika, Timotius Radcliffe mengatakan: "Orang asing menjadi sosok yang selalu dicurigai karena perbedaan agama, etnis dan budaya mereka."

Para pemateri terus menerus menggali sejumlah pertanyaan tentang bagaimana memastikan hak-hak dan kewajiban warga negara yang ideal bagi Muslim dan Kristen.

"Penegasan hak-hak kelompok yang terkait dengan representasi politik seringkali menimbulkan ketidakadilan bagi semua warga negara, ditambah dengan pembagian mayoritas-minoritas dan saling berpersepsi," kata mantan Menteri Luar Negeri Libanon, Tarek Mitri, yang juga pernah menjabat staf WCC.

Sementara itu pengamat dari Malta untuk PBB, Marie Thérèse Pictet Althann mengatakan: "Dalam rangka mendapat hak-hak kewarganegaraan yang sama, maka kelompok minoritas memiliki peran dan wajib berpartisipasi sepenuhnya dalam kegiatan dan pengambilan keputusan di setiap komunitas mereka sehingga untuk menghindari menjadi sub-kelompok yang terpinggirkan dan berpotensi membahayakan harmoni sosial."

Editor : Eben E. Siadari

Lubna Al Qasimi stresses UAE's desire to strengthen values of tolerance, harmony, co-existence



Source: Emirates News Agency

<http://wam.ae/en/details/1395302603153>

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Wed 15-03-2017 21:05 PM

Lubna Al Qasimi stresses UAE's desire to strengthen values of tolerance, harmony, co-existence

GENEVA, 15th March, 2017 (WAM) -- Sheikhha Lubna bint Khalid Al Qasimi, Minister of State for Tolerance, stressed the desire of the UAE's leadership and people to strengthen the values of tolerance, harmony and co-existence, and to respect diversity and accept the thoughts, cultures, religions and sects of others, while rejecting all forms of bias, hate, violence and fanaticism.

This statement came during a meeting today with Rev. Dr. Olav Fykse Tveit, Secretary-General of the World Council of Churches, on the sidelines of the 34th Human Rights Council Sessions of the United Nations that are taking place in Geneva, Switzerland.

She clarified that the UAE believes in building the human and humanity, and its national legislations and laws state that all members of society are equal in rights and duties, with no bias between them. The freedom of religious practice is also protected by law, and the country hosts more than 200 nationalities that live in peace and harmony and work together with appreciation and respect while communicating and interacting with harmony and unity.

Sheikhha Lubna bint Khalid Al Qasimi discussed the forms of joint co-operation with Dr. Olav Fykse Tveit, and she confirmed that the general goal of the National Tolerance Programme is for the sustainability of the values of tolerance, solidarity, brotherhood and co-operation between peoples and religions. These values apply locally, regionally and internationally, especially during increased incidences of hate speech, contempt, bias and violence that the world is witnessing.

She highlighted the international responsibility that falls upon all related authorities to face this dangerous phenomenon, which is not expressed by human nature and common values.

Dr. Olav Fykse Tveit was introduced to the seven main pillars of the National Tolerance Programme, which are Islam, the UAE constitution, Zayed's legacy and the ethics of the UAE, international conventions, archaeology and history, humanity, and common values.

He saw the five pillars of the programme as representative of the strengthening of the government's role as an originator of tolerance, and to consolidate the role of family in nation building, promote tolerance among young people and discourage them from fanaticism and extremism, enrich scientific and cultural content, and integrate international efforts to promote tolerance highlighting the UAE's leading role in this area.

The meeting was also attended by Ambassador Obaid Salem Al Zaabi, Constant Delegate of the UAE at the United Nations and other international organisations in Geneva.

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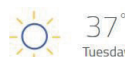
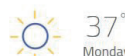
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Deux algériens au coeur d'une initiative mondiale

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L'attaque de Londres de mercredi dernier sera sans aucun doute saisie par les extrémistes de tous bords pour alimenter la tension entre les communautés musulmanes et chrétiennes installées en Europe et dans les pays où l'Islam est majoritaire. C'est que l'instrumentalisation des religions est devenue une arme aux multiples facettes. Ce que

subissent plusieurs régions du monde, depuis plusieurs années, est très significatif. La violence et le crime se sont retrouvés justifiés par des extrémistes bien loin des préceptes religieux. Une situation qui a fortement déstabilisée le tissu social de plusieurs pays occidentaux et musulmans dont la diversité ne posait pas de problèmes. Les minorités se retrouvent ainsi au milieu de conflits, souvent créés de toutes pièces pour assouvir des intérêts de castes et de lobbies.

Mais rester au stade des constats et des lamentations ne peut pas (plus) être une attitude responsable. Le temps des constats est bien dépassé. D'où l'urgence de secouer la cocotte et d'en faire sortir une fumée d'espoir. Deux algériens se sont retrouvés au milieu d'une initiative allant dans ce sens. Le premier, *Idriss Jazairy*, en étant un des parrains d'une conférence, et l'autre, l'ex-ministre des Affaires étrangères, *Lakhdar Brahimi*, en participant aux débats internes de la même rencontre. C'était le 15 mars dernier à Genève (Suisse).

L'objectif était de lancer un projet d'une grande envergure. Celui de préparer, pour 2018, une conférence mondiale pour mettre en relief la convergence entre deux religions abrahamiques, l'islam et le christianisme, et dont le but est de promouvoir l'égalité des droits de citoyenneté. Les initiateurs de cet ambitieux projet, dont *Idriss Jazairy*, aspirent à essayer de trouver des remèdes pour des sociétés traumatisées en élaborant une véritable reconstruction sociale. Pour cela ils axent sur l'implication des forces vives de la moitié de l'humanité, celles représentant l'Islam et la Chrétienté.

La pierre angulaire de la conférence de 2018

Le Centre de Genève pour la promotion des droits de l'homme et le dialogue mondial («Le Centre de Genève»), dont le Directeur exécutif est l'algérien *Idriss Jazairy*, a organisé une conférence en marge de la 34ème session ordinaire du Conseil des Droits de l'Homme de l'ONU.

Intitulée «*L'islam et le christianisme, la grande convergence: Travailler conjointement vers des droits égaux à la citoyenneté*» la conférence, de par son thème, et ainsi des espoirs qu'elle suscite, avait réuni plusieurs personnalités internationales. La qualité des institutions qui ont co-parrainé la rencontre en dit long sur l'importance accordée à l'événement. Outre celle de l'Algérie, il y avait les Missions permanentes du Liban et du Pakistan, ainsi que la Mission d'observation permanente de l'Ordre souverain de Malte auprès des Nations Unies Nations Unies à Genève. Leurs ambassadeurs respectifs étaient présents.

Les deux intervenant algériens, *Idriss Jazairy* et *Lakhdar Brahimi*, ont, chacun de leur côté, apporté leur « touches » à l'élaboration du projet. Le Directeur exécutif du Centre de Genève avait d'emblée rappelé que les débats de la rencontre seront la base sur laquelle se feront les préparatifs de la conférence mondiale en gestation.

similaires dans nos pays et en Europe abusent de l'islam et essaient considérablement de détruire ses valeurs, ses cultures et sa civilisation» a-t-il ainsi rappelé aux présents. .

Déclarations sur le projet: prémices d'un débat de fond

Musulmans et chrétiens se sont relayés lors de cette conférence à Genève. Dans leurs interventions tous ne cachaient pas leur soutien à ce projet d'une conférence mondiale. La relation citoyenneté-religion a été abordée de différentes manières. Les extraits de ces interventions (lire en dessous) donnent déjà un aperçu sur les contours de la conférence de 2018.

Hanif Hassan Ali Al Qassim (Président du Centre de Genève, lors de son discours d'ouverture) : *«Aujourd'hui, nous avons une excellente occasion pour discuter des convergences entre l'islam et le christianisme et pour poursuivre nos efforts conjoints combinant nos forces pour promouvoir l'égalité des droits de citoyenneté. »*



Prince Hassan bin Talal (Royaume hachémite de Jordanie, dans un message vidéo spécial) :



« N'y a-t-il pas un besoin impératif de procéder non seulement à un discours interreligieux, mais aussi intra-religieux? Je dirais que la citoyenneté concerne les valeurs qui ne s'appliquent pas, avec tout mon respect, aux noms de marque, mais qui s'appliquent à la promotion d'espaces créatifs communs, fondés sur des valeurs

partagées. »

Sheikha Lubna Khalid al Qasimi (ministre d'État à la tolérance des Émirats arabes unis (EAU)) :

« Abstraction faite de la spécificité nationale, tous les citoyens doivent bénéficier des mêmes droits universels. Nos États doivent protéger ces droits de l'homme. Pour accorder une protection égale, nous devons repenser notre dialogue chrétien-musulman. Ce n'est que par le dialogue et l'acceptation de la diversité de l'autre que nous pouvons parvenir à une réconciliation pacifique. »



Tehmina Janjua (ambassadeur du Pakistan) :



«Si nous voulons aborder la question des droits de la citoyenneté / des minorités à l'échelle mondiale, nous devons aller au-delà de la relation entre le christianisme et l'islam. Nous devons aussi aller au-delà de l'examen de cette question du point de vue de la religion seule. »

Marie-Thérèse Pictet-Althann (Observateur permanent de l'Ordre de Malte) :



«Pour renforcer les droits de citoyenneté égaux, il est essentiel que les minorités participent pleinement aux activités et au processus décisionnel de leurs communautés pour ne pas être un simple sous-groupe et pour ne pas être marginalisées, ce qui pourrait mettre en péril l'harmonie sociale ».

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**OVERVIEW OF PANEL DISCUSSIONS AND PUBLICATIONS
INITIATED BY THE GENEVA CENTRE DURING THE PERIOD OF
2014 - 2017**

Panel discussions

1. **Human Rights: Enhancing Equal Citizenship Rights in Education** (in collaboration with the Permanent Mission of the Kingdom of Bahrain, the UNESCO Geneva Liaison Office and UNESCO – IBE), 12 May 2017.
2. **Islam and Christianity: the Great Convergence – Working Jointly Towards Equal Citizenship Rights** (in collaboration with the Permanent Missions of Algeria, Lebanon, and Pakistan and the Permanent Observer Mission of the Sovereign Order of Malta), 15 March 2017.
3. **The Right to Development, 30 Years Later: Achievements, Challenges and the Way Forward** (in collaboration with the Permanent Mission of the Republic of Azerbaijan), 5 December 2016.
4. **Muslims in Europe: The Road to Social Harmony** (in collaboration with the Permanent Mission of the People’s Democratic Republic of Algeria and the Independent Permanent Human Rights Commission of the OIC), 19 September 2016.
5. **De-radicalization or the Roll-Back of Extremist Violence** (in collaboration with the Permanent Mission of the People’s Democratic Republic of Algeria), 23 June 2016.
6. **The Human Rights Council Special Procedures: Assessment and Way Forward** (in collaboration with the Permanent Delegation of the African Union), 13 May 2016.
7. **Islamophobia and the Implementation of UN Human Rights Council Resolution 16/18: Reaching out** (in collaboration with the Permanent Mission of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan), 29 April 2016.
8. **The International Day of the Remembrance of the Victims of Slavery and the Transatlantic Slave Trade: An Opportunity to Fight Racism and Prejudice** (in collaboration with UNESU and the UNESCO Liaison Office in Geneva), 29 March 2016.
9. **The Advancement of the Status of Women in the Arab World** (in collaboration with UNESU and the UNESCO Liaison Office in Geneva), 22 March 2016.
10. **The Current Migrant Crisis: an Aftermath of the Arab Spring?** (in collaboration with UNESU), 11 December 2015.

- 11. Children in Armed Conflict: The MENA as a Case Study** (in collaboration with UNESU), 30 June 2015.
- 12. Promoting Interfaith and Intercultural Dialogue** (in collaboration with UNESU), 5 March 2015.
- 13. Religious and Cultural Tolerance in Bahrain: Human Dimension of Global Civilization**, 22 September 2014.
- 14. Development and Human Rights**, 26 June 2014.
- 15. Combatting Political Extremism and Terrorism in the Middle East**, 19 June 2014.
- 16. Women's Right to Education in the MENA Region**, 16 June 2014.
- 17. Egypt: Democracy in Transition**, 5 March 2014.

Publications

- 1. Islam and Christianity, The Great Convergence: Working Jointly Towards Equal Citizenship Rights (2017)**
- 2. The Right to Development, 30 Years Later: Achievements, Challenges and The Way Forward: Proceedings of the UN Geneva Side Event Held on 5 December 2016 and Lessons Learned (2017)**
- 3. Muslims in Europe: The Road to Social Harmony. Proceedings of the UN Geneva Side Event Held on 19 September 2016 and Lessons Learned (2017)**
- 4. Women's Rights in the Arab Region: Myths and Realities (2017)**
- 5. Islamophobia and the Implementation of UN Human Rights Resolution 16/18: Reaching Out (2016)**
- 6. Muslims in Europe: The Road to Social Harmony (2016)**
- 7. De-radicalization and the Roll-back of Violent Extremism: Proceedings of the Panel Meeting (2016)**
- 8. In Defence of Special Procedures of the Human Rights Council: An Alternative Narrative from the South (2015 - English & Arabic)**
- 9. The Arab Group and the Arab States in the Human Rights Council: A Statistical Glance (2014)**



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