



مجلس كنائس الشرق الأوسط

The Middle East Council of Churches

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**“Third European Ecumenical Assembly”**  
**Sibiu - Romania**  
*An address by*  
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*One day, all human beings will learn about the only way that brings true and lasting peace and prosperity.*

Your Beatitude, Eminence, Graces, Dear Friends,

I would like to thank the opportunity to be with you today, and trust to attain all together the aim of this panel.

Every body is eager to have peace.. What is peace? How do we define a peaceful society? Where do we stand now in the Middle East?

Humanity's quest for peace is not confined to one region. The situation in the Middle East may be the most sensitive, but the search for security is still the major concern for many people and nations.

It is our regret that humankind in general has used violence throughout history, as a solution to disputes between men. It is also of regret that the peoples' cultures did much to curb religion towards their needs, and change it to be the cause of war, or used it from time to time in violence, in order to defend the religion, or in order to establish their principles. This mentality has in fact continued to the present day in different forms.

For security in the Middle East to be realized we must commit to resolve longstanding conflicts. The longer these conflicts and



insecurities ferment unaddressed, the greater the sense of injustice and humiliation. We will naturally require more than just finding a solution to the Israeli–Palestinian issue. We need to achieve stability in Iraq and Lebanon, to normalize relations with Iran, and to address pressing issues of development, governance and modernity throughout the region are only a few of the substantial challenges that must be dealt with.

If our strategies are focused on achieving human security, then we will definitely see the advantage of finding solutions through dialogue and negotiation rather than through confrontation and the use of force. It is in these same regions where, over time, we have seen the rise of extremism and the constant threat of internal strife, interstate wars and the efforts by states to seek weapons of mass destruction.

“Dialogue” serves as constant reminder that through understanding we can achieve cooperation, which leads us to coexistence, which in turn leads to greater harmony and peace. It is precisely this element of dialogue that is urgently needed. Therefore we have to welcome rather than ignore these invitations for inter-cultural dialogue. A beneficial dialogue, whether between religions, civilizations or cultures, is conditional `that the dialogue be based on common humanitarian principles and mutual respect, and that the goal should not be to do away with differences between people but preserve and celebrate those differences as sources of strength and wealth. We will have to share resources, combat common environmental and health issues, and interact with each other on many levels. By settling differences in a fair manner that balances the interests of all parties, we create the necessary environment for lasting peace and future cooperation.

What we really need in the Middle East is to take steps in favor of human rights and religious freedom, monitor their status and push for their broader applicability, which is something that might have political and economic consequences. For instance MECC took a sharp decision to spare a wider space for advocacy together with its member Churches. In this respect,



MECC started, with the Council of Catholic Patriarchs in the Middle East, a new phase of monitoring human rights cases all over the region.

In my capacity as MECC General Secretary, I attend many peace conferences, but unfortunately I do not see any concrete results.

There seem to be no international will to halt to it. The Israeli state has taken adroit advantage of the situation of western disarray and pursued its brutal step-by-step process of ethnic cleansing. This has only strengthened the position of hard-line Islamist fanatics and radicals in the region, putting Christians in an ever more precarious position, and stifling the voice of Muslim moderates and ordinary people who simply want to get on with living and making their world a better place for their children.

Therefore, we must view both the problems and their solutions. The international community must rise and come to the defence of the life, freedom and dignity of every individual or group, whether the aggressor is an occupying force or a dictator. We will not achieve national or international security unless every one of us is able to live in freedom and dignity. It is therefore imperative to put in practice a real force of the international community to protect against genocide, ethnic cleansing and other gross violations of human rights.

MECC sees that humanity is today at a critical stage in its history. The ambiguous values of globalization, the violent expressions of religious fanaticism, and the continuation of injustice in different forms have caused fear and insecurity everywhere

People are today in need of mutual understanding and cooperation in order to coexist in peace and fight insecurity and collectively confront many of the images of corruption and extremism in modern society. Discipline and vision are needed to bring out the best in what people have to offer.



Yet the main four categories of insecurity are:

- Poverty, and the way to break out poverty (a reality that around 45 per cent live on the edge of survival)
- The lack of good governance in some countries which ranges from corruption to human rights abuses,
- The fair distribution of resources
- Injustice that results from the imbalance between the 'haves' and 'have-nots'.

The artificial polarization along religious or ethnic lines, or 'clash of civilizations' and the protection of national borders and old concepts of sovereignty.

This is the basis on which we must 're-engineer' security. While national security is just as relevant as before, the strategies to achieve it must be much more global than in the past, and our remedies must be centered on the welfare of the individual and not simply focused on the security of the state.

Until we understand and act accordingly, we will not have either national or international security.

But to understand the urgency of reforming our system for maintaining international peace and security, we must also look critically at situations where it has not been able to adequately fulfill its function. I would mention three aspects in that regard.

First, the Security Council — as well as regional organizations and institutions — have often been unable to intervene in a timely manner in humanitarian crises, and in cases of gross violations of human rights. The ongoing tragedy in Darfur is one painful case in point.

Second, we have allowed some conflicts to fester for decades, with devastating effects. The Palestinian people, for example, have been subjected to 40 years of occupation, leading inevitably to increased polarization and militancy. These conflicts, like other more recent conflicts in Iraq, Afghanistan and Somalia, could be solved. They persist because the



international community, despite intermittent efforts, has not made the necessary investments nor mustered the resolve needed to end these conflicts.

Third, Reform Security Mechanisms and Institutions to Achieve Human Security as "Human security is too important to be left to governments."

The recent history of the Middle East teaches us that these conflicts cannot be solved through military force. Every type of violence has been tried, from occupation by force and military confrontation, to oppression, terrorism and targeted assassination — without getting close to peace or security. Each act of violence in the region only begets more violence and ad insecurity.

The solution will not lie in redressing all past injustice. If we are to solve the central conflict of the Middle East, we must begin by being ready to reconcile and recognize mutual rights and above all by finding in our hearts the ability to forgive.

The threat of other regional states acquiring nuclear weapons or other weapons of mass destruction will continue to be a grave international concern. The rise of extremist groups originating in the Middle East — and the ease with which they recruit in the region — will continue to be high on the list of international insecurities. Also, the dependency of many countries on Middle East oil and natural gas will continue to add a dimension of global economic risk to any conflict. And when events in the region give rise to perceived religious and cultural divisions between the Muslim world and the West, the repercussions will continue to be felt everywhere.

For security in the Middle East to be realized will naturally require more than just finding a solution to the Israeli–Palestinian issue. The need to achieve stability in Iraq and Lebanon, to normalize relations with Iran, and to address pressing issues of development, governance and modernity



throughout the region are only a few of the substantial challenges that must be dealt with.

But if the Palestinian question were to be resolved, a decades old burden of Arab–Israeli tensions would be lifted that would improve immeasurably our ability to deal with these and other challenges.

I do believe, however, that a solution to the conflicts in the Middle East is within our grasp, provided that the conditions are created to enable the solution to come into being. Also, if the parties involved can look beyond the pointless question of which comes first, the chicken or the egg, perhaps peace can finally get the needed period of incubation, and can give birth to a new era in the Middle East.

As we know from other cases, such as Northern Ireland, successful negotiation in the cause of peace requires the investment of considerable time and influence. The peoples of the Middle East must develop the needed trust in the process. For that to happen, they must regain faith that the outside world cares and is ready to give peace in their region the sustained support and engagement it deserves.

It is time to move away from thinking of dialogue as a reward for good behaviour —and to recognize it instead as an essential tool for effecting such behaviour. True peace requires dialogue and interaction between peoples, to enable them to know, understand and accept one another.

It is vital for the region and the world that a peace conference be convened with all the nations of the region involved in order to reach a settlement guaranteed by peace treaties for all the conflicts of the region.

We, as Middle East Council of Churches, representing the member churches in the Middle East, express today our deep concern about the situation of our Christian brothers in the



region, especially in the Holy Land and their continued suffering. Christian migration from the Middle East is a serious issue, as it affects Christian presence in a significant way. We are all well aware that the rate of Christians in the Middle East is changing and the decline in the number of Christians in the Middle East differs from country to country depending on socio-economic and political climate. These challenges often resort to them attempting leaving the region.

For there to be a true and lasting peace in the region, we believe that respect for International Law is the only way for a just and durable peace.

May we have the courage, wisdom and determination to work and dream for a just and lasting peace in our troubled region.

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