



The following is a statement from the Conference of European Churches in response to a resolution passed in the European Parliament today regarding the persecution of religious minorities by so-called ISIS/Da'esh.

Respect for Human Rights as a Precondition for Peace

The European Parliament discussed a draft resolution tabled by Swedish MEP Lars Adaktusson (EPP) at its plenary session from 1 to 5 February 2016. The draft calls for a European Parliament resolution on war crimes, crimes against humanity and genocide committed against Christians, Yazidi, and other religious and ethnic minorities in Syria and Iraq by the so-called ISIS/Da'esh.

The Conference of European Churches appreciates the efforts of European Parliament in addressing this important subject. Religious and cultural civilisations in the Middle East region are disappearing day by day. We are witnessing one of the most extreme forms of human rights violations in that region, which needs to be prevented and stopped. The destruction of religious communities, ethnic groups and their property—including religious and cultural sites with immeasurable value for humanity—is happening in the Middle East in a systematic and coordinated way. People are being murdered every day.

Most victims are members of religious and ethnic minorities including

Christians from the ancient churches (Chaldeans/Assyrians/Syriacs) in the region. Yazidi, Turkmen, Shabak, Sabaean Mandeans, Kaka'i, Sabian, Shia Muslim, moderate Sunni Muslim communities, as well as Kurds are captured by militants of the self-proclaimed Islamic State (IS) and other extremist groups.

With this resolution the European Parliament is sending a strong message to the UN Security Council to refer the situation in Iraq and Syria to the International Criminal Court. Upon such a referral the Court can assume jurisdiction. Only then could an investigation of these crimes commence under the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide (Genocide Convention). The Genocide Convention obliges state parties to 'punish' and 'prevent' genocide wherever it occurs via international criminal justice mechanisms. The intention of ISIS is to attack any group that disagrees with their political agenda or view of society. Their intention to destroy social, economic, cultural, religious, and moral foundations has been eminently evident from observations made to date.

The Conference of European Churches (CEC) urges all state and non-state actors to pay special attention to the religious dimension of this conflict. CEC deplores the use of Islam for political purposes and the kidnapping of people especially women, children, priests, and bishops.

CEC denounces the systematic targeting of Christian churches, monasteries, and other buildings by extreme militants. It asks all relevant regional players to advocate for religious diversity, religious tolerance, and pluralism in the inflamed region. The systematic vandalism, separation of families, violence, murder, and rape as part of the war strategy is unacceptable.

Therefore, CEC urges all parties of the existing conflict to find a peaceful solution and to seek the promotion and protection of human rights and respect for human dignity of all people. We urge parties in the conflict to establish an immediate ceasefire and to engage in meaningful dialogue for viable political solutions to the crisis in Syria and Iraq and to create the climate for a national and multilateral reconciliation.

Religion can and should be part of the solution; it should never have been permitted to become any part of the problem. Strong interreligious dialogue can contribute to social stability, mutual respect and religious tolerance, diversity, and peace. All parties in the conflict need to recognise the importance of the spiritual and cultural value of all religious and ethnic minorities in the Middle East region in order to create peaceful and inclusive democracies.

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The Conference of European Churches (CEC) is a fellowship of some 114 Orthodox, Protestant, Anglican and Old Catholic Churches from all countries of Europe, plus 40 national council of churches and organisations in partnership. CEC was founded in 1959. It has offices in Brussels and Strasbourg.

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