

**Geneva Meeting
The Role of Religions
in Promoting Peace and
Countering Violence and Hatred**



مجلس حكماء المسلمين
Muslim Council of Elders

Geneva Meeting The Role of Religions in Promoting Peace and Countering Violence and Hatred

Proceedings of the International Symposium
of the Muslim Council of Elders
and the World Council of Churches

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The cover image is a view of the Al-Azhar Mosque by the French Orientalist Prisse d'Avennes, (1807 - 1879). And another image of Europa regina, a symbolic depiction of the continent map of Europe, the Queen that symbolizes the medieval Christian world.

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**Speech of
the Grand Imam
Ahmed Al-Tayyib
Shaykh of Al-Azhar
President of Muslim Council of Elders**

In the Name of Allah, the Gracious, the Merciful.

Dr. Agnes Abuom, Moderator of the Central Committee of the World Council of Churches (WCC),

Dr. Olav, General Secretary of World Council of Churches (WCC),

Ladies and gentlemen,

As-Salamu ‘Alaykum Wa Rahmatullahi Wabarakatuh
May Allah’s Peace and Blessings be upon you.

I am glad to welcome you, having just used this Arabic greeting, which conveys love, fraternity, and peace. Let me express to you in my name and on behalf of the delegation of Al-Azhar and the Muslim Council of Elders, the warmest thanks for your kind invitation to attend this

historic and unprecedented meeting. I hope that we will achieve our goals with practical results that enable us to follow our path as believers from different parts of the world. As such, we may achieve the hope of humanity in overcoming those obstacles to civilization that can otherwise take us back to the times of darkness, ignorance, and to the laws of the jungle wild life.

Our due thanks go to the WCC for inviting us to this important meeting in the presence of some eminent scholars and religious leaders representing the monotheistic religions. We meet in the heart of Europe in the beautiful and peaceful city of Geneva. Here, it is a moment to assume responsibilities before conscience concerning the message of Allah to help revive hopes in the hearts of millions of human beings who live in fears and distresses. Let us restore happiness to despaired human souls and smiles to faces of orphans and widows among other victims of forced armed conflicts. Undoubtedly, the world nowadays is in dire need of your wisdom and reformation more than ever before to reduce human sufferings everywhere.

Many world statistics reveal the huge amounts of money allocated for arms races, causing humankind great sufferings. The poor nations involved even contribute huge amounts to the economies of big countries, which carelessly ignore human sufferings and the cries of

women and children. We are also facing unjust policies that pay no heed to the destiny of the poor and miserable people, causing disruption in society, exploiting resources, and depriving them of their freedom of choice. The unjust policies are gambling with human present and future, using openly new philosophies and theories such as “the clash of civilizations”, “the end of history”, and “the creative chaos.” These false modern theories remind us of those that were used by the occupying powers in the last century to deceive people into believing that occupation was not a form of domination and imperialism but a message of civilization and modernization carried out by the white men to save their Semitic fellow men from poverty, ignorance, and disease.

We thought that the leaders of the free world and the defenders of liberty, global peace, and human rights would never permit the confiscation of human fundamental rights in order to live in freedom, justice, and peace, particularly after the creation of the UN in the wake of the World War II. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights declares that the UN Charter will save humanity from sufferings, protect their human rights, and provide them with welfare and progress. The first article in this charter called for the protection of world peace and the security and the implementation of the principles of justice and equality among the member states, banning the use of force and violence or even the use of menace as well as the interference in

“local affairs of the states.” No one of my generation would have thought that this international charter—with its commitment to protect the oppressed and to combat the oppressors—would become a mere piece of paper without any practical effect on the developing countries in Africa and in both Arab and Muslim worlds.

In fact, these commitments, once presented and introduced with great hope for the oppressed peoples, are now, after nearly 70 years, no longer capable of fulfilling its obligations to combat injustice. Though the United Nations’ Charter was signed 68 years ago, it committed itself to combating different threats against the world peace, putting an end to military aggression among nations, and imposing stability and peace worldwide.

Unfortunately, the states empowered to safeguard the UN charter gave peace to parties of their choice based on their interests and strategies of hegemony and dictatorship.

It is a new immoral “logic of partiality” based on the immoral principle stating that “the end justifies the means.”

I am sure that you agree with me, ladies and gentlemen, that the real plague is the absence of peace worldwide. It is wrongly associated with the interests of some

states estranged from the firm moral and spiritual principles called upon by all monotheistic religions.

“This is the main difference between the philosophy of the Divine messages of peace as a prerequisite for human coexistence and the meaning of ‘peace’ in modern unstable and conflicting, yet mostly unjust, policies.⁽¹⁾”

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I will not cite in length what the holy books tell us about peace and its central role in maintaining equilibrium on the planet for the kingdoms of humankind, animals, plants, etc. The word “peace” is repeated many times in diverse contexts in the Old and New Testaments as well as in the Holy Qur’an. All the messengers and prophets were sent with the message of peace, love, and fraternity.

All Divine messages are based on the idea of enshrining peace among the individuals and the tribes. Allah warns those who violate peace with severe punishment. Throughout history, all empires that used oppression, injustice, and brutality as their policy to rule have ultimately collapsed and lost everything. In fact, humankind is the creation of Allah; in a good sense, we are Allah’s

1. Quoted from a word on world peace in the opening of Peace Forum in Abu Dhabi, March 9-10, 2014, adapted.

children. In this context, our Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings be upon him) says, “Human beings are Allah’s children and he who takes care of them surely is the most beloved to Allah.⁽²⁾”

Allah, the Almighty, defends the believers. I know that my expressions make no sense to many people, particularly the young people living in the West as well as some young people in the east. They are far away from the message of Allah; they have forgotten all about the moral principles of religions as badly influenced by the messages of derision and sarcasm of the atheists and their advocates.

Simply, they have a feeling of hatred against religions. This group of people rejects Allah’s precepts. They admire devilish means to serve moral decay and wickedness. As believers and messengers of human peace and love, we shall combat those evildoers, and all the messages of hatred, and stop their abuse of religion to spread terror and violence. We must stand strongly united against terrorism, which has grown and spread, blowing out its sparks east, west, north, and south.

2. Imam at-Tabarani, al-Mu‘jam al-Kabeer and al-Mu‘jam al-‘Awsat from Ibn ‘Abbas.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

We need to take up once more the philosophy of religions rich with principles defending peaceful coexistence and shared security for all humans. It is a truism that our modern age has suffered so much from the worldly principles, once presumed to be sufficient. Even the worldly principles of modernity, such as the technological and scientific development failed to grant humankind security, stability, and peace.

I do not need to remind you of the chaotic results of the two world wars and the death of more than 70 million victims in less than three decades. These two wars were not caused by religion or by moral religious precepts. It was in fact the disguise and restrictions of religion that resulted in this unforgettable catastrophe.

Humanity has experienced different political, economic, and social regimes, which led to the happiness of a limited category of individuals at a great cost to the majority of people living in extreme poverty. These regimes did not achieve stability and coexistence to peoples. It is noticeable here in Switzerland through the eyes of the elders of the West that this minority is controlling the world economy, monopolizing markets, and imposing “new forms of spoliation and plundering the resources of the poor nations.

They push many companies and pension funds to bankruptcy and ruin and fire thousands of workers.” In the illustrative words of the eminent religious scholar Hans Küng in the New York Times Magazine, “the principle of supply and demand does not necessarily lead to balance and that market philosophy can never replace ethics.” He rejoices to hear the voices of people in the USA warning of the mounting policy of egoism and selfishness and the greed of a rich minority.⁽³⁾

Ladies and Gentlemen,

We need to ask the following question, “What do we expect from peoples living in poverty and whose destiny is placed under the control of world policy-makers who ignore the notion of suffering, poverty, disease and illiteracy?” On one the hand , we cannot forget the images of bloodshed, the miserable distress of orphans and oppressed people fleeing to the desert with no shelter or food. On the other hand, we cannot forget the images of those living in extravagance and luxury in their ivory towers.

3. Hans Küng, World Moral Project, p. 31, trans. by Joseph Maalouf and Orsola Assaf, Police Library, Lebanon, 1998 A.D.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Witnessing human sufferance worldwide, I recognize the importance of this meeting and the necessity to assume our responsibility to reduce human suffering in hopes that we follow the right path, together with people of good will and strong faith. The delegation of Al-Azhar Institute has come to this meeting with deep concerns about the issue of peace in order to discuss the issue in the framework of this meeting of the elites, gathering both elders and scholars from Al-Azhar and the WCC. This meeting, with our Christian brothers and sisters, is the third one.

Last year, we met with the Church of England in the presence of a group of eminent scholars and priests chaired by the Archbishop of Canterbury. The second meeting took place this year with Pope Francis at the Vatican. After these two meetings, Al-Azhar called for the convening of an international conference on peace in Abu-Dhabi (UAE) next year and then in Egypt by the middle of next year, expecting the Pope to take part in it.

I am glad to invite the WCC to take part in these two conferences. I hope that young people from the WCC will have an effective participation in your official delegation. Truly, the last visit of the WCC youth delegation to Al-Azhar from August 18 to 22, 2016 was a success

and left a good impression on Al-Azhar students in Cairo and a good echo in the Egyptian and world media as well as the social media network. I was glad to hear from the youth and witness their willingness and enthusiasm to participate in the endeavors of peace to advocate the message of love instead of hatred.

Dear daughters and sons

Please, do not let your minds and thoughts accept the false messages mistakenly associating Islam with terrorism. You are best aware that religion and violence can only be inconsistent. I do not have any doubt that you know that religious messages basically came to bring about human happiness, save humans from loss and disbelief and liberate them from oppressing and servitude.

The religious armed groups speaking in the name of religion are in reality betraying both their religions and their own souls. They use religious messages to perpetrate crimes, slaughter, and destruction, which are all forbidden in religion. You know also of the horrible crimes perpetrated in the name of the Cross, using false interpretations of the holy books and killing great numbers of Muslims. However, no Muslim said that Christianity was responsible for these crimes.

Here, I stress that all these crimes of terrorism in their different names and slogans have nothing to do with Islam. Accusing the Qur'an and Islamic laws of these crimes is a form of aberration and illogical reasoning. Those who promote such false accusations should rather find the real causes of terrorism, which are linked to biased double-standard policies and the greed of the international and regional interests as well as the arms racing and markets. Before all, it is the weak faith that causes a man to forget Allah, deny the divine messages, and mock at prophets, scriptures, and messengers.

Thank you so much for listening.

As-Salamu 'Alaykum Wa Rahmatullahi Wabarakatuh

Ahmed Al-Tayyib
Shaykh of Al-Azhar
President of Muslim Council of Elders

Dhul Hijjah 26, 1437 AH/September 27, 2016 CE

The speech of Dr. Olav Fykse Tveit
General Secretary
World Council of Churches

It is a real pleasure and honour to welcome you here to the World Council of Churches, Your Eminence (Professor Al Tayyeb), as well as your distinguished companions.

Like yourself, and like the great institution of Al Azhar Al Sharif which you represent and the Council of Muslim Elders of which you are the President**, the World Council of Churches considers peace-building to be an essential part of the vocation of religious leaders and religious institutions. Indeed the overarching image and theme within which we are currently seeking to carry out our work and mission is that of a pilgrimage of justice and peace. We are using such language for several reasons. First because the importance of pilgrimage is recognized in many religions, and certainly in both Christianity and Islam we know that what we learn about ourselves and our world through being on pilgrimage can bring us closer to God. But we also use the language of pilgrimage because of its sense of openness and invitation and movement: we can invite all people of good will

to journey with us to work together for justice and peace in the difficult places of our world.

A starting point for us in any reflection on religions and peace-building is our fundamental belief, based on our Holy Scriptures, that all human beings are created in the image and after the likeness of God. We read in the Book of Genesis 1.26: Then God said, 'Let us make humankind in our image, according to our likeness.' This is a fundamental building block of Christian anthropology. It means for example that we believe that all human beings need to be treated with dignity, that all human beings have equal rights and responsibilities, and that there is a necessary freedom which all human beings should enjoy. However the Book of Genesis also links this essential aspect of human beings to the prohibition against violence, which God commands to Noah after the flood. It is said there starkly and strongly that murder and the shedding of human blood are prohibited precisely because of the fact that human beings are created in the image of God. The placing of these words in the early chapters of our Holy Scriptures is an essential building block for our firmly held belief that religion should never be used to attempt to justify violence. Of course we are well aware that in our world today, and in past centuries, there have been many times when adherents of both our faiths have tried to use religious motives to justify vio-

lent actions, and we have to be honest about this. Yet we also believe that if religious people can be honest with each other about the ways in which religion has been used to underpin violence, then in turn we can find ways together so that religion can also be part of the solution.

One of the ways that as religious leaders we can fulfill our God-given mandate as peace-builders, is by encouraging and fostering a climate in which members of our respective faiths are encouraged to deepen their own religious knowledge and understanding, making use of heart, and mind and soul and strength. The importance of proper religious education is essential. Both of our religions are scriptural faiths in which a Holy book, whether the Qur'an or the Bible, plays a very significant role. The potential for the misuse of such texts by people, who have not had the opportunity for studying the scriptures in context, and as a whole, is very considerable and we know that this has been a factor in much violence that is done in the name of religion. We need to be working both with future generations of clergy and leaders, as well as with those who, in the Christian tradition, we call lay disciples, to enhance their critical but respectful understandings of scripture. At the end of the Gospel of St John, the last and perhaps the greatest of the four New Testament Gospels, Jesus tells his followers, 'These things are written that you may believe... and believing, have life in his

name.’ (John 20.31) Therefore in my view the hermeneutical point from which both Christians and Muslims need to read their scriptures, is to seek approaches to scripture that bring out the centrality of God’s desire for human beings, and indeed the whole of creation, to enjoy ‘life in all its fullness’. Religion should give people hope Of course as well as specifically religious education the importance of a rounded educational process available to all, boys and girls, young women and young men, that takes account of the need to equip young people to thrive amid the demands and pressures of the modern world is essential. It is a necessary part of the human rights of children that they should receive the opportunity to flourish through that which education provides.

The World Council of Churches is seriously engaged in in peace-building with both Christian and Muslim partners in northern Nigeria. I hear from our partners in Nigeria – particularly our Muslim partners –the lack of appropriate educational provision has led to the sense of abandonment felt by many uneducated young men. Their despair becomes a fertile recruiting ground for Boko Haram and the dreadful violence propagated on the society at large.

Indeed one of the things for which I am very grateful to your Eminence is your commitment to support the ongoing presence of Christian communities in the Middle East, and to engaging with youth, and in particular

for your encouraging young Christians and Muslims to engage together in interreligious dialogue. I have heard about your direct involvement with the joint seminar that has taken place in Cairo this summer, in which young Christians and Muslims from several parts of the world came together to learn from each other and to learn from the context of Egypt. I hope that we will be able to build further on that in coming years.

Tomorrow you will be visiting and speaking at our Ecumenical Institute at Bossey which is marking the 70th anniversary of its foundation this weekend. We are honoured to have you as our speaker on this very significant occasion. The Bossey Institute began as a place where young Christians from different churches and many parts of the world could come together and learn from each other more about their Christian faith, what we call ecumenism. They also have to come to learn about how important it is to have strong and sustainable relations to people of other faiths. This is a common commitment of the WCC.

We want to see the Bossey Ecumenical Institute, provides a base enabling young people of several faiths to join in interfaith community together each summer; learning from each other and from specialist lecturers, Muslim, Christian and Jewish.

We would be delighted to welcome as a participant in the course next year a suitable young man or woman whom you might choose to send. And as part of our responsibilities as religious leaders working in peace-building let us look for other opportunities to work together in our support for young people. They are the future of our faiths, and the future of the world.

The world is changing in many ways, and the role of religion as well. The pilgrimage of justice and peace, which is the central thrust of the World Council of Churches' work and vision at the present time, is a pilgrimage that we believe Christians can invite all people of good will to share in.

**The speech of
Mr. Abdulrahman Sawar Al Zahab**

**Islam Strategy in Building World Peace
The role of religious scholars in combating violence
and terrorism**

Islam attaches importance to peace. Fourteen centuries ago, Islam called for peace as an essential and humanitarian value for human protection. Actually, it preceded all contemporary universal calls. For Islam, peace is the means with which a Muslim and his fellow human beings, Muslims or not, are ordained to maintain for their security and safety. When Islam calls for peace, it reaffirms that it grants more calmness and reassurance for the followers of its humane mission and for all non-followers who aspire for peaceful coexistence.

Islam initially started with promoting peace among its followers, thus extending fraternity as an obligation amid Muslim brethren. It asserts that through the Quranic verses, “All believers are but brethren” (the Quran, 49: 10). When Prophet Muhammad (Allah’s peace and blessings be upon him) arrived Medina, he made a con-

vention of fraternity between the Immigrants of Mecca (muhajirun) and the Helpers of Medina (ansaar).

With such sublime humane rule, Islam builds a society that is free from any violent or terrorist behavior. A Muslim cannot contend for precedence or superiority over his fellow Muslims and non-Muslims in the society. Only piety and good deeds are the divine scales for preference.

Islam also preserves the sanctity of humankind and necessarily calls for equality. The Quran speaks of respecting human race, being only humans without any further or particular definition. It says, "We have honored the Children of Adam and carried them in the land and the sea, and We have provided for them of the good things, and We have preferred them over many of those We created in a marked preference" (the Quran, 17:70).

Islam imposes equality among all humans without any racial discrimination and practically applies it to all through the provisions of Islamic Law. What is licit is lawful for all and what is illicit is unlawful for all. Due to the adoption of that principle, non-Muslims live among Muslims without losing any legal rights. It is noteworthy to recall the Jews when they fled Europe during the medieval eras rescuing their souls and religion and they did not find a safe haven except in the Islamic state in Andalusia and the North African Muslim states.

Applying the Islamic principles to enhance human peace, Islam emphasizes the freedom of belief as the Quran declares, "Say: 'The truth [has now come] from your Lord. Let, then, him who wills, believe in it, and let him who wills, reject it'" (the Quran, 18: 29). Hence, it unleashes free conviction of what man deems appropriate and convincing. Such tolerant vision based on the core of Islamic creed may be the motive behind spreading of peace among the different sects and doctrines. As such, nobody fights the other under the pretext of his belief.

The Islamic laws make it necessary to remove obstacles from community to help non-Muslim citizens live with Muslims. Islam erases barriers and have non-Muslims integrated in the society. Allah (may He be Exalted) says, "Today, the good things have been made lawful to you, and the food of those who have been given the Book is lawful for you, and your food is lawful for them" (the Quran, 5: 5). Allah also says, "Do not argue with the people of the book except in the best manner; except for those who are wicked amongst them" (the Quran, 29: 46).

Historical events provide clear evidence that Islam was and is still the most loving and friendly religion to the Christian and Jews. The Prophet's speech with them was very close to their souls and beliefs. The Islamic call was not contrary to faith and trust in Allah. Indeed, it was complementary, as all heavenly religions are integral and mutually understandable.

The Islamic tolerance is evident in the Prophet's dealings with the People of the Book, whether Christians or Jews. He was very nice and charitable to them; he visited their ill people and exchanged good deeds with them.

The history of Islam has many instances, which testify to the kindness of Muslim state towards non-Muslim citizens. The freedom of belief was very effective in this regard. It prevented all sorts of compulsion. No one was forced to convert to Islam under duress. Safeguarding non-Muslims and lifting injustice off were the general rule.

Some people think that adherence to Islam as a life-style contradicts with the presence of non-Muslim minorities among Muslims or may lead to clashes among the elements of the nation, which are the backbone of modern renaissance. However, this attitude is false and untrue. The Islamic constitution unambiguously protects non-Muslims. The Quran explicitly states, "Allah does not prohibit you from those who have not fought you because of your religion, nor drove you out of your homes, that you deal kindly and equitably with them. For Allah loves the equitable" (the Quran, 60: 9).

That text is not confined only to protection; the Quran goes beyond this by recommending Muslim children to show benevolence and kindness to their non-Muslim parents and support their non-Muslim relatives and neighbors. Simply, we are all humans and all humans are worthy of honor and kindness. The Islamic doctrines, ap-

proaches, and sound principles are centered on fraternity and high moral interactions with non-Muslims without any gaps left for violence and terrorism to emerge. In conclusion, we can highlight the following findings:

- Islam calls for peace according to some evident approaches and principles.
- The Quranic texts affirm the necessity of peaceful communications with non-Muslims.
- The Prophet's State witnessed forms of communications with non-Muslims.
- The current extremism and radicalism as well as anti-non-Muslim sentiments have nothing to do with Islam.
- Many examples are there to testify to the humanity and kindness of Islam with the people of the Book.

Muslim scholars should explain and enlighten Muslims about the peaceful nature of Islam to show them that extremist crimes have no connection whatever with Islam. Conversely, Islam interacted and coexisted with non-Muslims over the long times of Muslim Islamic civilization. There is a pressing need for joint efforts among all scholars of religion to entrench the pillars of peace and cooperation for holding conferences and initiating inter-faith dialogue, to further peace conceptions worldwide. As such, all humankind may live in peace and love.

The speech of Prof. Mahmoud Hamdy Zaqzoq

Preface:

There is no doubt that the concept of peace is one of the most beloved concepts to human souls. In this world, every human is keen to achieve peace personally or publicly. However, s/he is seeking to realize this concept in his/her own way and according to his/her understanding due to the absence of a real culture of peace commonly shared by nations and peoples. Religion, in the abstract sense of the term—be it heavenly or not, may be the most influential element in affecting human minds and consciences towards while seeking for peace. Nevertheless, many people may choose the wrong way because of the absence of a common culture of peace.

If we are here to discuss the culture of peace from the Islamic and Christian points of view as necessarily needed under the conditions of our contemporary world, there is also a dire need for mutual trust and respect among the followers of both religions. Hence, the availability of dialogue-suitable conditions is a prerequisite for the success of peace-culture. This requires each of

us to review his/her perceptions on the religion and doctrines of the other to exclude any negative perceptions and allow new generations, who have no hand whatever in the past wars, to entertain hopes for a bright future free from the tragedies and animosities of the past. The future should guarantee real peace for the entire world. Those in charge of religious responsibility in Islam and Christianity shall instill the culture of peace in the hearts and minds of new generations.

The Islamic perception of peace:

It is possible to outline the Islamic perception of peace in three overlapping circles. The first circle is the psychological peace that every one wishes to achieve within himself/herself. It is possible to attain this psychological peace through the second circle; namely, having peace with Allah as clearly felt in one's religious faith. Both circles form the third circle of having peace with others and with the outside world around us.

It is the role of religious faith in Islam to furnish a human being with a climate suitable for self-harmony and harmony with the outside world. Islam, in essence, signifies the act of submitting one's will to Allah. Therefore, a Muslim is able to assume his/her responsibilities and fulfill his/her real duties. The religious faith helps a Muslim have trust in the divine Providence and, hence, overcome all difficulties and obstacles. Ultimately, peacemaking is

a reality. As far as the Islamic perception is concerned, it is fair to say that peace is a human act and a divine grace to humankind as well. Allah has described himself in the Holy Quran as the “Peace.” The Arabic term of peace is derived from the very origin of the term of Islam. Islam and peace are identical. The common greeting of Muslims is peace. Moreover, Muslims, at the end of each of their five daily prayers, turn to right and left while declaring the greeting of peace, which symbolizes their extending of peace to all humankind in the world to their rights and to their lefts. It reflects Muslims’ wish of peace for the entire world.

Difference is not a justification for conflict and dispute:

Allah created people different in colors, forms, languages, and races. However, variation in creation is not a reason for conflicts and disputes among nations and peoples. On the contrary, Islam makes this difference a starting point for reciprocity of knowledge, harmony, and cooperation in everything that would result in good benefits for humankind. In this regard, the Quran says, “O you humankind, surely We created you of a male and a female, and We have made you races and tribes that you may get mutually acquainted” (the Quran, 49: 13). All people are equal. There is no difference between human beings. Superiority only lies in the good deeds and welfare that one may extend to other fellow human beings in general.

Differences in faith should not be a reason for conflicts and disputes. Religions, in essence, came from the divine spirit by which Allah has created humankind as the Holy Quran asserts. Allah ordered the angels to prostrate themselves to Adam when He completed his creation, “When I have molded him and breathed into him of My Spirit, then fall down to him prostrating!” (the Quran, 15: 29). Hence, the responsibility of religions is to strengthen this spiritual connection between Allah and human beings. If a human being assumes his/her responsibility in supporting and strengthening this connection with Allah—the Peace, this will positively affect his/her behavior and relations with other individuals, groups, peoples, and tribes. Allah is the creator of everything and to whom everything will ultimately return. The promotion of peace in this world, in response to Allah’s will, is the responsibility of religious leaderships. Our failure to achieve this end is not only a sign of default, but also a form of forsaking the religious duties towards Allah and the entire world where we live.

The responsibility of promoting the culture of peace:

It is our duty to promote the culture of peace everywhere limitlessly among all followers of religions as far as we can without exclusion. The current world has many means that can help spread the culture of peace, especially the audio, read, and visual media. In this regard, it is

essential that the message of peace should reach schools and universities as an essential element in educating the new generations in peace to bring up generations of believers in peace and its fruitful results for individuals, societies, and nations. The happiness of individuals and communities is only possible through peace. Destruction and damage are the inevitable result of the current disputes, conflicts, and wars that our contemporary world currently suffers. A person who fails to learn from the past events will not achieve any benefits for himself or for the community where he/she lives.

It is necessary for promoting the culture of peace to remind of the tragedies and terrifying calamities caused by wars and conflicts between nations and peoples. In this regard, we remember Europe wars in the first half of the last century. Some contemporaries, who are still living, witnessed them. More than sixty millions of humans were victims of these wars that burst in Europe since 1914 until the end of World War II. Do we wait for our contemporary world to repeat these tragedies and calamities in the 21st century?

Obstacles in the way of peace:

We should not ignore that many obstacles impede the way to achieve peace in the world. Achieving peace is not attainable without uprooting the causes of conflicts and disagreements worldwide. Nations and peoples cannot accept and believe in peace value unless justice is

achieved. Double standards policy is an act of open injustice and error. How can I convince an oppressed person with the value of peace while s/he suffers daily injustices and oppressions? Examples are many; the most obvious to us is what the Palestinians have suffered over the past seventy years without any hope for peace. Establishing justice is the shortest way to peace.

Inevitability of continuous promotion of the culture of peace:

If achieving justice is a far reach goal so far, this should not discourage us from doing our utmost in calling for universal that all people around the world should have. Peace is a great value that should not be manipulated. Spreading peace all over the world can be a strong immunity against any attempt to disturb the world peace. Allah—to Whom we pray in mosques and churches—will not forgive us, if we do not stand united against any aggression on peace. Peace is the right of all human beings around the world, which is the world of us all.

Commonly Shared Values:

We have to teach the new generations that the value of love, which is the slogan of Christianity, corresponds with the value of mercy in Islam. Love and mercy are two sides of the same coin. We have to set aside any doctrinal difference between Christianity and Islam and

revive the commonly shared values in human souls. The Holy Quran provides for the shared foundation, which represents the strong rule for cooperation between us to achieve the shared goals. This rule is declared in the following verse, “Surely, the believers, the Jews, the Christians and the Sabians—whoever believes in Allah and the Last Day, and does good will have their reward with their Lord. There will be no fear for them, nor will they grieve” (the Quran, 2: 62).

The commonly shared principles, which represent the solid foundation for cooperation between Christianity and Islam are as follows:

- Belief in Allah
- Belief in the Last Day
- Doing righteous deeds

I think that there is no difference between Muslims and Christians regarding such principles, as they are equally established in both religions. Such principles represent the base for cooperation between both religions. At the same time, such principles represent the shared goal for which all our efforts must be devoted. However, no one should think that I call to dilute differences or characteristics of each religion. I only focus on the principles, foundations, and baselines, which represent a wide frame for cooperation between Christianity and Islam. I end my speech with the usual Muslim greeting of peace and mercy, saying “Allah’s Peace and Mercy be upon you.”

Agnes Abuom speech

I appreciate the title that has been given to our dialogue: “Towards an Integrated World” ... I appreciate it for various reasons ... because it is an important reminder both that we cannot make simplistic divisions, such as between east and west, and because it reminds us that events, actions, movements in certain parts of the world affect and are affected by what happens in other regions. This is what we mean by globalization.

So I am speaking to you as a Christian woman from East Africa, specifically from Kenya, but I am very conscious that what is taking place in Kenya is profoundly influenced both by the dynamics of the rest of Africa, and by developments that are taking place outside our continent.

Until fairly recently, Kenya was considered a beacon of interreligious harmony. It had and has other problems, such as (you give examples) – but in terms of Christians and Muslims living together it was seen as a positive model by many other countries. Although there were Al Qaeda suicide bombings attacking the US Embassy in 1998, this was seen primarily in terms of the world out-

side Kenya playing out its problems in our country. Clearly, this changed with the dramatic events of three years ago – the siege of the Westgate shopping mall brought Kenya into the unwelcome realization that religiously motivated domestic violence had arrived in the country. That has been reinforced by the dreadful attack on Garissa University College and regular incursions linked to the group called Al Shabaab. Such atrocities have now led to the building of a wall in the north of Kenya.

The reality is that the relationships between the Christian and Muslim communities in Kenya were already strained. The demography of Kenya – with the Muslim community comprising about 20 to 30 per cent of the population, and particularly concentrated along the coast and in the north-east – meant that with some justification the Kenyan Muslim community could feel that Islam and the Muslim community were marginalized within Kenyan national culture. Muslim regions of Kenya are among the poorest and least developed areas of the nation, and many Muslim leaders see this disparity as a result of the corruption and injustice of the government in Nairobi that is led predominantly by Christians.

It is interesting to see how all this is reinforced by perceptions that each community has of the other. Such perceptions have been built up over a considerable period of time and are influenced by the mutual history of

our two communities. Many Kenyan Christians consider that the coastal Muslim community in particular is somehow not really Kenyan, they are depicted as “Arabs” – a perception that is in fact reinforced by school textbooks. Christians also tend to emphasize their own role in the independence struggle, and as the architects of modern Kenya. On the other hand, Muslims speak about their long history of urban development and civilization along Kenya’s coast, sometimes implying that the ancestors of modern Kenyan Christians were uncivilized, living in the jungle. Muslims also frequently refer to Christianity as a European religion, the religion of the colonizers. Islam is, therefore, portrayed as the agent of Kenyan civilization, while Kenyan Christians are portrayed as following in the way of their former colonial masters. Each community portrays itself as the true founder of Kenya and depicts the other as essentially “foreign” to the nation.

These notions too often are reinforced by the actions of the government of the day, and the government is frequently accused by the Muslim community of favouring Christians. For example, the paperwork required to establish Kenyan citizenship has been found to be considerably more demanding for Muslims than for Christians. A particular issue which has dominated civic life in the last decade has been the question of the status of qadi courts – Muslim religious courts which can decide matters of

personal status, marriage, divorce or inheritance when all parties profess the Muslim faith. Although, as a woman, I might want to question whether under such a legal system my rights would be entirely equal to those of a man, nonetheless I have to acknowledge that such courts have been part of Kenya's constitutional fabric since independence. Indeed, these courts were given their role specifically to encourage the Muslim dominated coastal regions to agree to become part of Kenya. One of the unfortunate realities is that in discussions about constitutional amendment in Kenya, some Christian leaders have misrepresented the situation regarding such courts, seeking to claim that they are an innovation being forced on the population, rather than acknowledging their role throughout the history of independent Kenya.

The growth of a certain illiterate radicalism and fundamentalism is a feature of life in recent years in both the Christian and the Muslim communities in Kenya. It is a tragic truth that the Westgate attack three years ago seems to have proved to be an effective recruiting campaign for al-Shabaab. Thousands of Kenyan Muslims have joined the militant group. This response must surely reflect the sense of alienation and exclusion segments of the Muslim community feel vis-à-vis Kenyan society and political culture. However, radicalization is not only a problem of

Muslims. A comment by Wambugu Nyambura, a Kenyan security expert at Leeds University in England, is telling: “There is Christian fundamentalism taking root in Kenya, and this is contributing to the dynamics of religious intolerance in the country, and so we have to look at things collectively because it seems to me that someone is trying very hard to start a religious war in this country.”

The growth of neo-Pentecostalism among the Christian community in Kenya, and other parts of Africa, is a factor that has contributed to the increased sense of mutual hostility between Christians and Muslims. Neo-Pentecostal magazines which easily can be found in Nairobi, often contain testimonies of conversions to Christianity which link Islam with evil spirits. Correspondingly, the practice of confrontational street preaching in Kenyan Islam, what is known as *mihadhara*, has provided a context in which Muslim speakers try to discredit Christian scriptures, often reinterpreting such scriptures to support their own views.

What both phenomena suggest to me is that the religious leadership, both Christian and Muslim, needs to be more courageous than it hitherto has been. Without directly supporting attacks on the other religion, there have been some occasions when religious leaders have given a sort of silent approval to what their followers are saying and doing.

But another essential element for a genuinely peaceful future for the people of Kenya is that religious leaders must foster the importance of learning, and in particular learning about the other. One of the jewels and fruits of the Christian ecumenical movement in Africa is the existence of PROCMURA – the Programme for Christian Muslim Relations in Africa. Although this deeply respected programme is Africa-wide in its scope, it is no accident that it has its main base in Kenya. For over 50 years, it has been seeking to encourage Christians to learn more about their Muslim neighbours, and on many occasions it has offered a platform for those involved in conflict to engage positively with each other. Another very different but equally important programme is the Centre for Christian-Muslim Relations in Eastleigh, which is a slum area of Nairobi. This programme is supported by St Paul's Christian University of Limuru. It seeks to make a difference in a context in which, because of poverty and illiteracy, religious fundamentalism and its associated tendencies towards violence are prone to develop and flourish.

What is the message from Kenya to this important meeting for dialogue and peace-building?

First, that integration in our world can work negatively or positively. We in Kenya cannot be unaffected by struggles and tensions beyond our borders. Conceivably, however, we also are able to offer positive stories that influence the wider world.

Secondly, that positive integration and questions of identity are inevitably interwoven. For many people in Kenya, there is clearly a link between religious and national identity. What it means to be both either a Christian or a Muslim and a Kenyan needs teasing out and must be worked on constructively by the Christian and the Muslim leadership.

And thirdly, that issues of religion and violence cannot be considered in isolation from economic, environmental and educational issues. Religion is affected by poverty, deprivation and - above all - illiteracy.

If we want to work for an integrated world, we need to do so with a holistic vision that takes account of all these factors.

Religion and Violence
Increasing penalties for criminal offenses
of killing and injuring other

Muhammad Quraish Shihab

In the Name of Allah, the Gracious, the Merciful

It is necessary for any consideration of the issue of extremism and violence to explore the meaning of extremism. Many discussions attempted to define its meaning linguistically, but eventually consensus is not attained.

Some argue that according to Arabic and English lexicons, *tatarruf* (extremism) denotes “keeping away from the middle course. In English, it is going to the most remote in any direction or to the very great or greatest degree or edge. Another group takes it to mean, “exceeding the middle point. In this sense, extremism is still a standing fact, even if it does not touch the extreme outlines. The first group, apparently, tolerates some aspects of it, so long as it does not reach the point of exaggeration or exceed the proper bounds to violence. It is an expression of their keenness to preserve human unlimited

rights. They forget that extremism whatever limited will eventually end in autism that may lead to enmity and violence.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

If extremism had not been denounced except for autism, it would have been enough to reject it. A devout autist adheres to tradition without discrimination between what is good and what is bad. S/he refuses what is novel, denying the religion its important functions—the guidance.

Like stagnant water, rigidity and stagnation in religion turn the religion useless. Extremism ends up not only with autism, but also with even labeling others with sins and mistakes leading to denial, abstention from cooperation and even violence. Such matters lead to the disintegration of society, a case unacceptable to any religion or reason.

One of the functions of religion is to avert corruption and its means, as the religion does not start its role when distresses appear but shall prevent their rise beforehand. Accordingly, extremism is not to “reach the limits” but to “exceed the moderate points.” However, this meaning of extremism does not end the debate, if we accept the philosophers and religious scholars’ argument that “safety

lies in the middle course.” This middle course is, however, debatable from a society to another. Even inside the same society, the elements of time change, values, cultures, and traditions make it difficult to define extremism.

If we have to say something about extremism, even if it is not inclusive or sententious, it is a process of denouncing the social values, principles, criteria, and traditions common in a certain society causing worries or at least concerns to rise.

Evidently, peace is the hope of all human beings. All religions direct followers to spread peace. The Prophet of Islam (may Allah’s peace and blessing be upon him) says, “Proclaim peace to whom you know and whom you do not know.”

Islam stresses the prohibition of annoying others or causing worry to them placing emphasis on the necessity of peaceful coexistence. It prohibits unjustifiable backbiting of others through spiteful speech about them in their absence. For justifiable reasons, one may do so in cases of necessity.

Simply, Islam ensures the rights of the insulted and save the society from evils. It is no wonder that Islam encourages Muslims to say to their opponents “Either we

or you are guided, or are clearly astray. Say, “You will not be asked about our crimes, nor will we be asked for what you do. Say, “Our Lord will gather us together then He will judge between us with truth. He is the Judge, the All-Knowing” (the Quran, 34: 24-26).

One may mull over the fact that Islam encourages the believers to be neutral, even in describing themselves as “criminals” without stigmatizing others as criminals. On the contrary, extremists insult others and declare them disbelievers; they torture and even kill them. This Quranic verse opens doors wide for accepting the others and respecting them, leaving their final judgment to Allah on the Day of Judgment.

Losing one’s ability to respect others’ peaceful beliefs and ideas or ignoring them is indicative of extremism and autism. This fact finds further clarification when one blindly thinks that his/her beliefs are the unquestionable truth, while the beliefs of others are the sheer falsity. This point only foreshadows violence!

All religions condemn different kinds of violence, even against plants, animals, and inanimate things. What then about violence against human beings? It is said, “Kindness is not to be found in anything but that it adds

to its beauty and it is not withdrawn from anything but it makes it defective.”

Human, divinely planned, stewardship over the world does not mean that man oppresses the world. Man could not subject the world, unless Allah enabled him/her, so humankind must keep, not corrupt, it. Allah (may He be Exalted) says, “Do not make mischief in the land after its reform” (the Quran, 7: 56). He encourages humankind to befriend the world to achieve the divine objectives behind the creation.

All forms of violence and use of powers or threats to do or prevent anything in opposition to human laws and ethics—are forbidden and deniable. Violence and terrorism are synonymous. Indeed, the terrorist crimes are worse than theft and killing, for they pose a threat to the entire society and destabilize it in both security and political aspects arousing fears in human souls.

To sum up, all religions and people with sound minds denounce the unjustifiable use of force and violence, let alone the religious commandments that urge forgiveness, mercy, and forbearance. All humans are liable to err and forget. However, religions—especially Islam, do not set a punishment for every error or sin. Islam, for instance,

does not prescribe a certain punishment for the sin of disbelief in Allah, which is the gravest human sin.

Likewise, those who know nothing about Islam are not called disbelievers. Even those who know Islam in passing or know it well are not criminalized for their rejection, so long as they do not commit any transgression. Only when they commit a form of transgression, they are punished for their transgression, not for disbelief.

Therefore, peaceful non-Muslims may live with Muslims and enjoy full rights without any harm. The Quran orders the Prophet of Islam, “If one of the idolaters seek protection from you grant him protection till he hears the word of Allah then make him attain his place of safety; this is because they are a people who do not know” (the Quran, 9:6).

Ladies and Gentlemen,

People may mistakenly think that the prescribed penalties (hudud) laid down by Islam are violent acts. Indeed, it is a false claim. Islam only applies hudud when their conditions are fulfilled and the accused is entitled to get the benefit of any doubt. The discussion of hudud is firmly associated with two fundamental rights:

First, the right of sinner to repentance and reform.

Secondly, the society's right to maintain its entity and protect its members from criminals and chaos.

As such, the door is open for the criminals to repent and reform their behaviors. In this way, Islam gives opportunity to those sincere in repentance to prove righteous. The Quran waives the punishment of banditry when bandits sincerely repent and do righteous deeds before being arrested. By analogy, some Muslim scholars state that the same is equally applicable (i.e. waiving the punishment in case of repentance) to other crimes.

Many people confessed their crime to Prophet Muhammad (May Allah's peace and blessings be upon him), asking him to carry out the prescribed punishment against them, but he ignored their request because their confession indicated repentance.

Excuse me, if I may mistake in comparing the Prophet's attitude to Jesus' saying "Let him who is without sin among you be the first to throw a stone at her" (John: 8).

Jesus' statement was said when a woman was caught in adultery by the Pharisees and the Scribes. The law was to stone her to death. Then, Jesus stood up and said to the woman "Where are your accusers? Did not even one of them condemn you?" "No Lord," she said. He then said, "Neither do I. Go and sin no more."

In my view, this is the same stance of religions concerning any sinner, who repents afterwards. This excludes wrongdoers, who should be punished because of insistence on crimes to save the society from disorder. Before I end my speech, allow me to give a brief response to the misconception of accusing Islam of violence, terrorism, and merciless punishments.

The misconception stemmed from misunderstanding a Quranic verse, which apparently commands full preparation against the enemies to instill fears in their souls. In other words, the punishment aims to deter the enemies of humanity and the enemies of values of justice and righteousness. Evidently, the enemies are potential sources for evils and harms.

Preparing forces does not necessarily mean its use; they only aim to deter the enemies and prevent them from implementing their vile aims. The military experts call it a “deterrent effect.” Thus, it has nothing to do with the so-called “terrorism.”

As for the Quranic commandment not to show compassion while implementing the hudud, it does not mean being merciless. The term *ra’fah* (compassion as stated in the Quran,

24: 2) is different from the imposed mercy. According to Arabic lexicographers, ra'fah is an excessive aspect of mercy.

Thus, the prohibition of showing ra'fah is directed at those who have interests with the criminal, like relatives, friends, etc. lest they may carelessly overlook justice. In fact, the Quran enjoins doing justice to all people equally, be they the beloved ones or enemies.

Allah (may He be Exalted) says, "Let not hatred of a people incite you not to act equitably; act equitably that is nearer to piety" (the Quran, 5: 2). He also says, "O you who believe, stand with justice as witnesses to Allah, even if against yourselves or the parents or the relatives. Even if he be rich or poor, Allah is more worthy of them, so do not follow desire into being unjust. Yet, if you twist or turn away, then Allah is All-Aware of what you do" (the Quran, 135).

**Ladies and Gentlemen,
Thank you all for your listening.
May Allah's peace and blessings be upon you.**

The Role Of Religions In Promoting Peace

Metropolitan Prof. Dr. Gennadios of Sassima

(Ecumenical Patriarchate)

Vice-Moderator Central Committee
of World Council of Churches

We are living today in a very special situation, in tragic even discouraging circumstances, looking at the situation in our world. Violence, wars, injustice, and fear as well as acts of terrorism are rooted in the lives of our peoples. Therefore we are daily facing that peace is still absent, that poverty as well is growing and suffering of our humanity is still touch peoples lives. We are asking ourselves: What sometimes is the relationship of our Christian faith to the violence we see in the world? How do we respond to violence in a manner that is rooted in our faith and our relationship to God? In this relationship with a God of peace and justice, how do we experience peace and justice in our own lives and labor so that they may be realized in the lives of others, in our communities, and in our world?

These are some of the questions addressed by numerous historians, theologians, sociologists and politicians as well by people from different Christian traditions and other religious faiths.

In an increasingly complex and violent world, various religions, Christianity and Islam in particular, have come together to recognize, along with other religious communities and living faiths, that working for peace today constitutes a primary expression of their responsibility for the life of the world. This responsibility is grounded on the essential goodness of all human beings and of all that our common God the Creator has created, continues to sustain us, and is leading us towards unity and a greater future. For all, peace is inextricably related to the notion of justice and freedom that the Creator has granted to all human beings through the creation as a gift and vocation. Peace and peacemaking are a gift and vocation to provide opportunities to connect our ethical witness and faith with social transformation and renewal. The dynamic nature of peace as gift and vocation does not allow its identification with stagnation, passivity and the acceptance of injustice.

Today, the role of religions in the contemporary world's circumstances requires the transcendence of all morbid manifestations of religious fanaticism and intolerance of the past, which are alien to their spiritual mission and have heaped many woes on humanity, as well as the full support of peace, social justice and human rights, which are called for in the teachings of all Religions to a greater or lesser extent constitute a common basis for their constructive dialogue with contemporary political ideology as regards the relations between human beings and between peoples.

The independent discourse of Religions in their relations with the communities of their adherents, which confirms the historical endurance of their spiritual relationship with society, is capable of credibly promoting both the needfulness of the vision of peace, that the world may live, and the arduous path for experiencing this vision that modern man, thirsting for freedom, peace, and justice, will have to embark upon.

We all also acknowledge that Religions have occasionally been abused in the past to serve national, political, religious interests, and which are not foreign to their spiritual mission, and that, in their name, and in deviation from their teachings, crimes and atrocities have

been perpetrated against innocent people. Therefore, we expressly and categorically repudiate all violence, terrorism or criminal action carried out ostensibly in the name of religion, thus reasserting our interreligious declaration that “all crimes perpetrated in the name of religion are crimes against religion itself”.

Indeed, we launch an appeal to the spiritual leaders of all religions to undertake the necessary work and to cooperate in achieving the defusing of these perilous confusions, in order thereby to achieve the truly credible furtherance of God’s will that peace, social justice and respect for fundamental human rights will prevail.

We also launch an appeal to political and intellectual leaders of all peoples and international bodies to avail themselves of the opportunity to make use of the institutional role of religion in a positive manner, in order to achieve the peaceful resolution of local, regional and more general conflicts, and to realize an ambitious plan for education towards peace, in order to remedy the prepossessions and painful experiences of the past. We also urge that the cooperation of all contemporary mass media be secured for this plan to achieve the widest possible outreach.

We reassert our unwavering resolve to continue with our constructive interreligious dialogues both to achieve a spirit of mutual understanding and sincere cooperation, and to promote such a spirit in the practical affairs of our contemporary multicultural societies. Therefore, we give our full support to all interreligious and intercultural initiatives that are guided by such a spirit.

Our task today is to strengthen the role of peace, dialogue, and tolerance in the development of peaceful co-existence between Christians and people of other respective religions, Muslim and non-Muslim peoples in particular. Some western concepts of national identity connect tolerance with the submission to the values of a majority. But, 'Tolerance does not mean being influenced by others or joining them; it means accepting others as they are and knowing how to get along with them'. The dialogue diminishes our disagreements with one another. Such dialogue always aims to develop a new dual identity, one which is connected with religious identity and the other which reflects membership in a secular nation.

The role of inter-faith dialogue is to develop tolerance and a common secular identity with respect to religious identity. A dialogue must involve the participants in a discussion of the values, needs, and traditions of each

religious group as well as the possibilities for the creation of a common identity concept that would satisfy and respect the values and needs of all religious groups.

We may also think that these existing conflicts of today hardly affect us because we live so far away, but they do. However, in spite of these polarizing trends, God wants us to stand in the gap and be peacemakers. In fact, this situation affords us an opportunity to share the Good News of peace, as it is written in Prophet Isaiah, “How beautiful on the mountains are the feet of those who bring good news, who proclaim peace, who bring good tidings...” (Isaiah 52:7). Nowadays people are feeling a deep need for peace which serves as a reminder that we should take this peace message wherever we go.

Your Eminence and distinguished Sisters and Brothers, Since God loves peace, it is not surprising to find this topic frequently mentioned in the writings of the Prophets, especially with regard to God’s plans to bring peace to this troubled world. Meanwhile, the topic of peace is intuitively appealing so let us not be timid or to afraid to engage people in talking about it. This is also true of Muslims, who believe that their religion is peaceful.

The dynamics of an inter-faith encounter between Muslims and Christians differ, because of their historic re-

relationships as well as their major theological, social, and political concerns are different. Contemporary initiatives in Muslim-Christian dialogue can be understood better in the larger context which can be established by a brief overview of dominant themes in Muslim-Christian encounters.

The world needs peace, justice and reconciliation for the benefit of the dignity of humankind independent of its religious background, culture, race, color and national identity.

How we can live alone to each other in spite of our differences? It is true that we differ each other and this we experience in our daily lives in many parts of the world.

However, we are united in God's creation, where each of us has its place and role to play. How we can deny God's love who created this world for us? We need each other to share the experience of the human values, where we can find common platforms of understanding in many issues which the center and the focus is the "man" (the anthropos), the humankind.

How live in complete isolation which brings us to death? Dialogue is needed, to open our hearts and minds and to see each other face to face with respect and digni-

ty without barriers and prejudices. It is the time to stop any actions of violation and terrorist actions and conflicts and wars and to establish peaceful bridges for reconciliation and to overcome the painful hostilities of the past.

Today we are also facing the tragic phenomenon of refugees who struggle for a better future for their lives and families.

But in order to do so, we need to live in a complete freedom. A freedom in which each of us can live in equal rights not with special rights, because all we are members of the “global house”, of the house of God which is offered by his love and grace to whole humanity.

We need strong voices which can speak openly with honesty and respect to those who still remain indifferent or to those who still need a “modus vivendi” in order to be mobilized for a constructive dialogue of friendship and in a spirit of togetherness and human fellowship.

Finally, dialogue represents also a new and major effort to understand and cooperate with others in increasingly interdependent and religiously diverse countries. The newness of dialogue and the absence of conceptual clarity have required experimentation. Issues about planning, organization, representation, and topics need careful consideration and collaboration in the future.

**The Role of Religions in Promoting Peace
and Countering Violence and Hatred**

**Rev. Dr. Martin Junge
General Secretary of the Lutheran
World Federation**

In
Towards an Integrated World:
Dialogue between the Muslim Council of Elders
and the World Council of Churches
Geneva, September 30 – October 1, 2016

Your Eminences, Excellences, distinguished dialogue partners, Let me first of all express my joy about this moment of discussion and dialogue across religions, in order to address an issue that is a concern to the whole human family: peace.

I want to acknowledge the presence of the Muslim Council of Elders led by the Grand Imam, Professor Ahmad Al-Tayyeb from the Al-Azhar University in Egypt. Your outreach and your determination to come with your

delegation to the Ecumenical Centre in Geneva to sit with us and discuss peace is a great encouragement.

We are able to be together here, because we recognize each other as representatives of religions which, while different in several aspects, are unanimous in their focus on peace. Peace is at the heart of our respective religious traditions, because peace is God's vision for all humanity. This is why our traditions speak, and should also speak about peace.

Already the fact that our respective sacred texts make such an emphasis on peace, calling believers over and over again to peaceful lives, reveals a reality, which through the eyes of faith we can't but humbly acknowledge: the message of peace is directed to human beings that carry within themselves the potential for conflict, and that under specific circumstances express this inclination in overt violence.

As it is not fair to say that specific religions have the monopoly over peace and others over violence, it is not fair either to say that there would be any believer, in any of the many religious tradition in our world, that wouldn't fall under this ambivalence of human nature: we are capable of the most beautiful expressions of art and beauty, of love and care, and yet also capable of the most abhorrent violence, hatred and oppression. This ambivalence characterizes Christians, Muslims, Jews,

Buddhists, Hindus, Zoroastrians and you name it. Not because of their religious affiliation, but because of their human condition.

We seem to be living again in a period of human history, where the pace of change, the volatility of structures and the pressure on individuals and communities seems to trigger conflict and violence and conflict. We live in times of fragmentation. Communities that in the past managed to live peacefully together struggle. Political instruments like the UN, or regional structures like for instance the European Union: they struggle too. They have hard time to manage working together. Hateful speeches are in the rise. Political leaders surrender to a “majority rule”, which neglects the fundamental democratic principle of the protection of equal citizenship of all. And at times, communication even breaks down, isolating communities, drifting them away from each other in what appears to be an irreversible journey of alienation.

Where does religion stand in all of this?

I think our being together here is an expression of the fact, that we are unanimous in our resolve not to be derailed from our message of peace. I believe we are confident enough in the conviction that our respective religious traditions speak powerfully enough into our lives and into our world so as to give us the basis and the

strength to resist the trend of fragmentation, violence and communication breakdowns. I believe we understand our role today, which is to prophetically stand up against messages, attitudes and actions that counter God's intentions of peace for the entire humanity.

But what does it take, in practical terms, to offer this witness in our world? Let me offer some few perspectives here:

- Although this is not the first meeting to discuss peace and the role of religions to build peace in our world, and although I assume there will be many more to come, I'd still like to defend our coming together these two days as significant and meaningful. To remain in dialogue is in itself already a deliberate step to claim the vocation of peace of our religions, and to avoid being derailed into opposite attitudes.
- Yet, we know as well that if such meetings do not give us direction in view of action that needs to follow, we will fall short, and will eventually generate frustration, instead of encouragement among people looking up at their leaders for direction and for hope.
- In the following I want to offer some possible action lines:

Protect: In view of all the violence that is unfolding today, I believe there is a duty to protect human beings in volatile contexts, particularly where they are at risk

of becoming pray of sectarian violence of any kind, including religiously motivated. I am convinced that experiences like the interfaith monitoring center of violence that was established in Northern Nigeria recently, which involves Christian and Muslim organizations, is a good example to be replicated.

Educate: we have a responsibility to educate our respective constituencies, particularly our religious leaders in our communities towards awareness of extremism and how to be guarded against it. We should know this from history: there is no extremism, of any kind, which wouldn't attempt to make religion to become its instrument. Here I am particularly keen that we develop the courage to identify within our own sacred texts those passages and references, which have been used to justify violence based on religious believes. I confess to you that I feel uneasy when in settings of interreligious dialogues there is strong emphasize on the peace messages of our own traditions, without admitting that there are also those other texts, which could be interpreted to condone, if not instigate violence. Or which openly call for it. And these texts, let's face it, are being used. What will we do with these references in our sacred texts? What will we say to our preachers on Friday and Sunday in view of how to relate to these texts? We won't be able to fight religious extremism without giving tools to our leaders to relate

and interpret those texts in our respective sacred texts that –rightly or wrongly understood – seem to be condoning of, if not calling for violence. LWF has started work with Muslim scholars to go deeper into the question of the interpretation of sacred texts. I would love to see this initiative growing and becoming a larger conversation.

Serve: in the year 2014 religious leaders from around the world adopted the Statement “Welcoming the Stranger”. This statement, developed under the leadership of UNHCR but with the involvement of all different religious traditions came up with the common conviction, to be found in all religious traditions, that the stranger is to be protected. This document has become very important for us to advocate in Europe for the duty to protect refugees. But it has also become an invitation to begin to work together for people in need. Because not only the word “peace” is common to our two religious traditions. Also the word “love” is common to us. LWF has worked together with Muslim organizations in Jordan, Kenya and Nepal to support people in need. That joint service – this is my experience – carries the weight of ten statements one could issue. Is there space for more such joint service?

Empower youth: I want to finish my presentation by referring to the importance to empower youth. Yes, I believe we can help through teaching them to live in peace

and harmony. Actually, they would do this right away, if they only would see their parents, leaders and elders doing accordingly. Youth is not the problem today. Leadership is the problem today, and what youth learn from it. But to me the issue goes deeper: we live in a time that is marginalizing youth in a systematic way from hope and perspectives. I was glad to see, after visiting Dar Es Salaam four years ago, when a church burned in a poor neighborhood, that Muslims and Christians came together and analyzed the problem that led to this incident. In their analysis, the eruption of violence was due to poverty, lack of perspectives and marginalization. All of this makes communities, but also young generations very vulnerable to hate speech, mobilization and extremism. Isn't it dramatic: extremism seems to offer more meaning and hope to vulnerable communities, than the political, social and economic system is able to do? Young people need to have a perspective for their lives, so as to love their lives and the lives of others. A teaching of youth that doesn't come with empowerment of youth, will go only halfway.

Your Eminences, Excellences, distinguished discussion partners. It is good that we have come together to talk about peace. That's what we should do. And indeed, there is more we could do.

Joint Statement
Issued by the World Council of Churches (WCC)
and the Muslim Council of Elders (MCE)
At the end of the conference held
in Geneva-Switzerland
September 30—October 1st, 2016 CE

A historic meeting brought together the World Council of Churches (WCC) and the Muslim Council of Elders (MCE) headed by Professor Ahmad al-Tayyeb—the Grand Imam of Al-Azhar, at the headquarters of the WCC in Geneva, Switzerland from September 30 to October 1, 2016 CE. The WCC Central Committee moderator Dr. Agnes Abuom and WCC General-Secretary Rev. Dr. Olav Fykse Tveit welcomed his Eminence Professor al-Tayyeb and the accompanying high-level delegation of the Muslim Council of Elders.

The two-session gathering reviewed the major issues of the inter-religious dialogue, ways of combating religious extremism and promulgation of peace culture. The Grand Imam then delivered a speech at the Ecumenical

Institute at Bossey on “the role of religious leaders in inspiring human hearts with hopes.” The theme and main concern of the conference was to promote the culture of peace and the role of religious leaders and institutions in this respect as well as in encouraging pro-peace endeavors. We all believe, being the followers of Allah’s Prophet Abraham, that humans are created to share love, amity, peace, clemency, honesty, and faithfulness.

The conference discussions mainly focused on the vital role of followers and leaders of religion in peace-making. They also explored the religion-related relation between poverty and violence. The meeting participants called for spreading the religious values and cooperation among the followers of religions as the best means to combat extremism and revive hopes for human nations. They strongly called for the empowerment of youth to become active members in their societies. The gathering affirmed that it is necessary that all human beings enjoy equal rights and responsibilities, being citizens in their countries.

The WCC and MCE confirm their commitment to the following:

- They denounce all forms of fanaticism and racial discrimination based on religion, race, class, ethnicity, or descent.
- They encourage religious leaders to cooperate with all relevant local institutions and authorities to highlight the true image of religions in their right conception.
- They promote all successful initiatives, such as the initiative of “Family House” founded by Al-Azhar in Egypt in cooperation with the Coptic Orthodox Church and other churches. It is necessary to repeat such successful initiatives.
- They call for serious considerations for all possible ways to promote opportunities for women to contribute in the process of peace building and promoting.
- They urge all parties to stop arms race, which poses a real threat to all nations and call for re-orienting such resources to combat poverty, ignorance, and illness, which are the havocs that face both poor and rich peoples alike.
- The gathering appeals to all religious leaders to seek for achieving justice and peace for the entire humankind.

At the end of the conference, the two parties agreed on convening the next meeting in the first quarter of 2017, God willing.