

Final Communiqué
Issued by the Participants at the Conference on

Evangelical and Christian Presence in the Middle East

In light of the radical changes that the Middle East region is currently passing through; changes that directly impact the present and future destiny of its Christian inhabitants -- instilling in them a genuine fear of what lies ahead -- the *Fellowship of Middle East Evangelical Churches* (Lutheran – Anglican – Reformed) held its first international conference on “**Evangelical and Christian Presence in the Middle East**” from Monday 13 to Wednesday 15 February, 2012 in Beirut, Lebanon. The Conference was attended by most of the ordained and lay leaders and heads of the member Churches of the *Fellowship*, as well as delegates from sister Evangelical churches and church institutions in Lebanon, the ME region, Europe, the USA, Canada and New Zealand.

The opening session was held at the Evangelical Church in downtown Beirut. In addition to the participants, it was attended by present and former Lebanese ministers and members of parliament, representatives of local and international evangelical churches and institutions, as well as representatives of sister Eastern Churches and local Islamic leaders.

Mrs. Rosangela Jarjour, the General Secretary of *FMEEC*, welcomed the attendants and invited Rev. Dr. Salim Sahiouny, president of the *Supreme Council of the Evangelical Community in Syria and Lebanon*, to open the conference with a word of welcome followed by a prayer. A series of keynote speakers delivered their speeches starting with Rev. Andrea Zaki, president of *FMEEC* and vice-president of the *Council of Evangelical Churches in Egypt*. He was followed by Bishop Munib Younan, presiding bishop of the *Evangelical Lutheran Church of Jordan and the Holy Land* and president of the *Lutheran World Federation*, Fr. Dr. Paul Rouhana, General Secretary of *Middle East Council of Churches* and Rev. Dr. Thomas Wipf, president of the *Council of Protestant Churches in Europe*. Additionally, ex minister Dr. Tarek Mitri and present MP, Dr. Farid El Khazen, offered two major interventions. The session concluded with a summary of the program of the conference presented by Rev. Dr. Habib Badr, vice-president of *FMEEC*.

The Conference also received words of greetings from the *World Council of Churches*, the *Lutheran World Federation*, the *World Communion of Reformed Churches* and the *First International Meeting of the Protestant Synods in Europe*.

In the afternoon the participants reconvened at the *Commodore Hotel* where two major interventions were delivered by the Very Rev. Dr. Patrick Sookhdeo and Rev. Dr. Mitri Raheb. Each gave an insightful general overview from his perspective of the present moment in the Middle East in light of the drastic changes brought about by the so-called “Arab Spring.” It was noted that the rising paradigms of governance in the Arab world today seem to be based on a moderate or radical political Islam that have replaced the mostly military regimes of the past few decades. A realistic view was offered as to how Christians should practically respond to this new situation.

With detail and precision, other local experts delineated the main challenges and disturbing effects that the recent events in the Middle East region have had on Middle

Eastern Christians. Suggestions were made as to how Evangelical Christians may face the challenges in their various contexts and circumstances. Special attention was given the role that the Evangelical tradition played in the life of the Middle East and how Evangelicals met similar challenges in the past, and how may they continue to do so in the present and the future.

After the opening worship service the next day, a series of testimonies from different contexts in the region were given. These included Jerusalem and Palestine (Bishop Munib Younan), from Egypt (Rev. Dr. Safwat El Bayadi, president of the Evangelical Community), from Iraq (Rev. Haitham Jazrawi, president of the Evangelical Community) and North Africa (Algiers). Each speaker described the present situation in his home country and the impact it has had on the local Christians in light of recent developments during the last year.

The session closed with a critical consideration of the theological foundations of Protestant presence and witness in the Middle East; a presence and witness that is based on Reformation traditions that have faithfully advocated all just and righteous causes. A consideration was given to the role of historic Protestant institutions and organizations in the region that have furnished a rich legacy and have had a powerful impact on the life of the East in various areas and fields of work such as theological training, education and culture, socio-economic development, medical services, communications and media, etc.

Time was dedicated to workshops and discussions. Experts formulated questions that the participants responded to in reaction to what they heard during the conference. The target of the workshops was to reach a definitive strategy that contributes to rebuilding Middle Eastern Evangelical communities on the basis of a new and indigenous "*theology of public issues*," a theology inspired by a unified Christian evangelical vision that calls for freedom and equality before the law in the context of a just understanding of citizenship for all ethnic, religious and national identities, and that contributes to the further development of human resources. In this regard, the participants emphasized that a final, just and fair solution to the Palestinian crisis is necessary for any future progress on all these fronts.

The working groups also emphasized the commitment to our faith in the living hope ever incarnate in the Lord Jesus Christ. They also stressed the need for a genuine ecumenical openness to their Eastern Christian brothers and sisters, as well as the necessity of fruitful and constructive cooperation with non-Christian groups in the Middle East, and especially the Muslim communities – a cooperation built on solid foundations of coexistence based on equality of human rights.

The final plenary session summed up the conclusions of the conference and formulated the necessary steps that Middle East Evangelicals ought to take in order to safeguard their presence and invigorate their witness in the future. They explored ways in which they could remain faithful to their universal Reformation legacy while properly responding to the challenges they currently face in the various countries where they live (Lebanon, Syria, Egypt, Jordan, Palestine, Iraq, Turkey, Iran, Sudan, North Africa and the Gulf region).

The attendants made an appeal to all people concerned to work for the emergence of a Middle East that enjoys peace based on justice, freedom and the respect and preservation of human rights. They called upon all their Muslim compatriots, but

especially those authorities now in power, to work for the establishment of *civic states* in the region; states founded on a modernized understanding of democracy which is not based merely on numbers and vote counts, but rather on equality in the rights of all to equal citizenship under the just rule of law; states that offer equal opportunities for work and prosperity to all the inhabitants of the Middle East without discrimination. It is only in such a Middle East that all communities, evangelical and non-evangelical, but especially the youth amongst us, shall enjoy safety and wellbeing, and therefore shall no more live in frustration and fear, or be subjected to the temptation to emigrate.

A plea was put forth to all those concerned with the question of Christian presence and witness in the Middle East (be they regional or world governments, church leaders and congregations or partner organizations across the globe) to become more aware of the dangers currently besetting all Middle Eastern Christian minorities, but especially the evangelicals amongst them (who are a minority within a minority).

An invitation was issued to all our regional and international partners and friends, inviting them to conduct a serious investigation into the truth of what is in fact happening in the different countries of the Middle East; and which differ from one country to another. Having done so, it becomes incumbent on all to inform the international community of these facts and to respond accordingly. It is our hope that this response shall be inspired by the Biblical principles upon which the Evangelical Reformation was based centuries ago. To us this means to uphold justice and truth and repudiate the violence that now so sadly prevails in the Middle East region – violence that comes from *all* sides and parties involved.

And finally, a specific call was issued to all Middle East Evangelicals, and particularly to the youth amongst them (who played a pivotal role in the movements for change and liberty during the recent events), not to give up hope in spite of all the challenges that lie ahead; but to hold steadfast to the faith of their ancestors and to remain rooted in their homes and homelands. We invite all to work for reconciliation and peace in the Middle East and to advocate *all* just causes, while at the same time safeguarding the values of freedom and human dignity for all. We are hopeful that all faithful Christians of the Middle East shall continue to work for the true revival of their churches and for the reform of their societies.

Beirut,
February 17, 2012