

The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you all.

**Speech by Bishop Dr. Munib Younan
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“Thanks be to God for He is good and His mercy is everlasting.”

Your Holinesses, Your Graces, dear sisters and brothers in Christ,

Psalm 131 says: “How good and beautiful it is when brothers and sisters are meeting together.”

We thank the Lord that He is good, and that we can meet today in Amman as sisters and brothers in Our Lord Jesus Christ after a long break. As Our Lord said: “Whenever two or three are gathered together in my name, I am there.” (Matthew 18:20) Today it is Our Lord Jesus who gathers us as one holy universal apostolic church, and He is in our midst. He is the one who unites us and confirms our mission to carry together, each in their own way, the Gospel of love in the Middle East. For this reason, He tells us: “Do not be afraid, little flock, for it is your Father’s good pleasure to give you the kingdom.” (Luke 12:32)

As President of the Middle East Council of Churches representing the Evangelical Family, we would like to send His Majesty King Abdullah II Ibn Hussein our love and thanks for hosting this General Assembly of the MECC in this very hospitable country. It is the first time in the history of the MECC that the General Assembly has met in the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan. Jordan has invited us as ones who are determined to send a clear message of peace and hope to the Middle East. We pray that God may protect Jordan, her king, and her people, and that God may continue to bless this country with tranquility and security.

Jordan is the country of the Amman Message, in which King Abdullah II has declared and announced to the whole world that the only right religion is religion

which promotes toleration and living together. Jordan is also the country that has initiated the “Common Word” document, which says “The core of religion is loving God and loving the neighbor.” It is well-known that the country of Jordan is characterized by healthy and distinguished Muslim-Christian relations. This country’s constitution guarantees equal rights to all its citizens. For this reason, Jordan has initiated the International Week of Harmony, even in an age when religious extremism and blind sectarianism are dominating. These documents and actions are powerful answers to such contaminated ideas. External groups promoting such ideas use and abuse religion for their narrow political interest and their selfish economic goals. We need to carry instead the Message of Amman and the Common Word to the whole world through our churches. We will tell the extremists of exclusivity the words of the Apostle John, who said, “If anyone says, ‘I love God,’ and hates his brother or sister, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother or sister whom he has seen cannot love God whom he has not seen.” (1 John 4:20)

Thank the Lord, for He is good! As we meet here in Amman we are determined as the original Christian churches to revive and reinvigorate the MECC, which has faced some trials and tribulations in the past years. We are determined to build upon the blessings and support of Your Holinesses, Graces, and Heads of Churches, representing the Four Families of churches in the Middle East. Reinvigorating the MECC is both a Christian and a national duty. It is a Christian duty to unify our Christian world, so the MECC will reflect the pure and authentic voice of Arab and Middle Eastern Christianity. It is our national duty to raise our Christian voices within our societies. We must proclaim words of comfort, words of equality, words of inclusion, words honoring diversity and pluralism, words of justice, words of freedom of religion. In this time, and in the name of Jesus, we must put our hands together and reunite our world in a spirit of truth, both prophetic and pointed.

We know very well the pain that some of our sisters and brothers are suffering in some countries of the Middle East. Many of them are facing difficulties which challenges the future Christian presence and living together in our region. Our sisters and brothers are faced with immigration, displacement, expulsion, and persecution. We assure you, our dear sisters and brothers in Christ, that your pain is our pain. Your strength is our strength, and your weakness is our weakness. We

pray that you will be steadfast in your faith in the midst of your suffering. You have become a living Christian witness for all of us and indeed for all of humanity. As one of the church fathers has said, the blood of the martyrs will be the seeds of growth for the living church. The church is not only a witness in times of peace and harmony. The church of Jesus Christ is a witness also in difficult times, carrying the Gospel of love into difficult political situations, into the midst of displacement and even persecution. You, our dear sisters and brothers in Christ, are a living model of *martyria* for all of us. As Our Lord Jesus Christ has said, “Blessed are you when people revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.” (Matthew 5:11-12)

To my partners in mission gathered here today, know that the Holy Spirit is still working in the Christian Church—locally, regionally, and globally—even in these difficult times. We thank the Lord for He is good! For He is calling the MECC to unify its common Middle Eastern Christian witness. He is calling us to be ambassadors of reconciliation, instruments of peace and justice, carrying the witness of healing and equality to our societies, and advocating for justice issues at home and internationally. This common Christian witness we share calls us to a closer relationship as partners in the Middle East.

Thank the Lord for He is good, which we can see in the genuineness of our common Middle Eastern endeavors.

I would like to give a few examples of this common witness. First of all, two months ago we greeted members of our Orthodox family in Crete who have sent a message of love and mutual witness to all of us.

Secondly, in my capacity as President of the Lutheran World Federation, and in commemoration of five hundred years of the Reformation, the Vatican and the LWF will hold a common prayer on 31 October of this year. His Holiness Pope Francis, the General Secretary of the LWF Martin Junge, and myself will pray together in Sweden. This is an historic reconciliation between the Catholic and Lutheran sister churches. Through this event we are harvesting the fruits of years of genuine ecumenical dialogue, which has the potential to be a witness of healing and reconciliation to all our churches and societies.

In the same way, the Christian churches of the Middle East are called today to raise one common prophetic voice without fear or reluctance. We are called to be ministers of healing for our region and our world. We are called to continue to raise our voice against oppression, against extremism, against occupation, against injustice, against displacement and persecution. We will continue to raise our voice in support of justice, peace, equality, and reconciliation. We can and will do this because the Church is not only a human institution, but a divine Body which witnesses for divine values. This Body will never be at peace in the Middle East until justice has overcome injustice and oppression, love has overcome animosity, human rights have been achieved for all, and the values of pluralism, diversity, and freedom are available to all. For this reason, the Church in the Middle East must work with people of good conscience from every religion as our companions in this one motherland, to implant these noble and sublime common values. We especially seek to plant the principles of equal citizenship with equal rights and equal responsibilities, principles which embrace diversity.

My dear brothers, Your Holinesses, Your Graces, and Heads of Churches of the Orthodox, Oriental Orthodox, Catholic, and Evangelical families, let us not leave Amman before we agree together to unify our work, our words, and our witness. Let us not leave Amman before we promise to pray for one another and support one another. Let us especially pray for our two kidnapped brother bishops, for all the imprisoned and detained, the persecuted and occupied, and the refugees. Let us pray for the peace of Jerusalem, and for justice for the Palestinian cause. We pray as one for a just peace for every country represented in this meeting. As Peter says, "The prayers of the righteous are powerful and effective." (James 5:16)

May God the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit bless this General Assembly, that the Church of Christ in the Middle East will continue its witness of love, peace, justice, equality, and reconciliation.

May the peace of God which passes all understanding keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.