

## **The Plight of Churches in the Middle East – Revisited**

*Statement of the Members of the North American Orthodox-Catholic Theological Consultation*

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Mississauga, Ontario

October 26, 2013

In 2011 we, the members of the North American Orthodox-Catholic Theological Consultation\* deplored the devastating losses in the Christian communities of the Middle East in the aftermath of the “Arab Spring.” Today the situation of many of the Christian communities in Egypt, Iraq, Syria, Lebanon, and Palestine has become catastrophic.

Together with the 2013 Assembly of Canonical Orthodox Bishops of North and Central America, we repudiate all violence and demand action by responsible authorities to end the kidnapping, torture, and killing of Christians and all civilians. We also appeal for the release of Greek Orthodox Metropolitan Boulos Yazigi and Syriac Orthodox Archbishop Yohanna Ibrahim, both of Aleppo, Syria.

With regard to Syria in particular, together with the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops and the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops, we join Pope Francis in exhorting the international community “to make every effort to promote clear proposals for peace without further delay, a peace based on dialogue and negotiation... May no effort be spared in guaranteeing humanitarian assistance to those wounded by this terrible conflict, in particular those forced to flee and the many refugees in nearby countries.”

As the Canadian Council of Churches has stated, “We are concerned for the safety and security of all the people in the region, but in particular, the weak, vulnerable and powerless. The spread of sectarian violence puts all generations throughout the region at risk and is a menace to the hopes and dreams of the younger generations.”

With the Clergy-Laity Conference of the Greek Orthodox Metropolis of Boston, we “deplore the wanton destruction of Christian churches, monasteries, convents, orphanages and hospitals throughout the Middle East....We call upon the leaders of our nation to protest these unspeakable acts of terror and to work unceasingly to bring to an end the heinous genocide of our brethren.”

When one part of the body suffers, all suffer (cf. 1 Cor. 12:26). As Orthodox and Catholic Christians, we therefore have the responsibility to respond to the needs of our brothers and sisters. We call upon our communities to continue to pray for the churches and for peace in this part of the world. We urge the leadership of our churches to continue to intervene vigorously in behalf of the Christians of the Middle East, who live in fear for their lives, their communities, and the very future of Christianity in the region.

*\*The members of the North American Orthodox-Catholic Theological Consultation are appointed by the Assembly of Canonical Orthodox Bishops of North and Central America and, on the Catholic side, by both the Canadian and United States Conferences of Catholic Bishops.*