

FINAL COMMUNIQUÉ OF THE 10TH GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE MIDDLE EAST COUNCIL OF CHURCHES.

1-Under the theme "*and the multitude of them that believed were of one heart*" (Acts 4:32), the 10th General Assembly of the Middle East Council of Churches was held in the ancient city of Paphos, Cyprus, on Tuesday and Wednesday the 29th and 30th of November, 2011. All the member churches that constitute the four families of the Council (Oriental Orthodox, Orthodox, Evangelical and Catholic) attended the meeting that was hosted by the Orthodox Church of Cyprus represented by its Archbishop his Beatitude Chrysostomos II.

2-The General Assembly proceeded with its planned agenda that included words of welcome from the Archbishop of Cyprus, as well as the four presidents of the Council, the General Secretary, and a host of guests that came from the East and West representing their churches and other international ecumenical bodies. It discussed the reports of the General Secretary, the Finance Secretary and the coordinator of the *Task Force* that had been entrusted with the future restructuring of the Council. The Assembly also elected the presidents for the coming four years. These are:

His Holiness Aram I, Catholicos of the Armenian Orthodox House of Cilicia – on behalf of the Oriental Orthodox family.

His Beatitude Theophilos III, Patriarch of the Greek Orthodox Church of Jerusalem – on behalf of the Orthodox family.

His Grace Bishop Munib Younan, president of the Lutheran Church of Jordan and the Holy Land – on behalf of the

Evangelical family

His Beatitude Mar Ignatius Yusuf III Younan, Patriarch of the Syrian Catholic Church of Antioch – on behalf of the Catholic family.

His Grace Bishop Boulos Matar was elected honorary president.

3-The General Assembly also elected a new Executive Committee and concluded its deliberations by electing Father Dr. Paul Rouhana, of the Maronite (Catholic) Church, as the new General Secretary for a coming period of four years. He replaces Mr. Guirgis Ibrahim Saleh, who was elected as honorary General Secretary.

4-The General Assembly asserted its firm belief that Christian unity remains the basic purpose and mission of MECC. It carefully considered the present state of the Church in the Middle East from spiritual, social and national perspectives.

5-Those assembled gave thanks to God for the new atmosphere of love, reconciliation, cooperation and dialogue that now prevails amongst the churches, and in the hearts, minds and souls of church leaders. All agreed that MECC remains the common meeting ground for all the Christians of the Middle East. Thus efforts must be intensified to revive the Council and strengthen the ecumenical movement.

6-Christians are deeply rooted in the East. They have effectively participated in and contributed to its renaissance and in defending the integrity of its territories and all the pertaining national rights of its inhabitants.

7-They stand ready and committed to participate in the building of a new future for the Middle East and accordingly they renounce the idea of emigration in spite of all the difficulties that Middle Eastern Christians are presently facing. They call upon all the faithful to hold steadfast to their hope in the peaceful coexistence of the peoples of the

Middle East, and thus they support the recent and ongoing movements of reform, change and development for the common good of humanity.

8-In view of what is now occurring in some countries of The Middle East, the General Assembly wishes to remind all concerned parties, *but especially the International Community*, of the need to preserve and protect fundamental human rights and principles, such as the freedom of thought, of religious belief and of political action.

9-The Assembly asserts its repudiation of resorting to violence as a means of conflict resolution, no matter who the perpetrator may be. Dialogue, equal citizenship and the rule of law – in the context of a civil and just state – must prevail amongst all the peoples of the Middle East.

10-The General Assembly reiterates its support for all just causes and in particular the right of the Palestinian people to self-determination, in accordance with international legality.

11-In this context, the Middle East Council of Churches stresses the great need to protect and preserve all holy sites and houses of worship. It deplores the acts of bombing of these places, and especially condemns the killing and displacement of Christians. Those assembled consider religious freedom and the freedom of worship as sacred human rights. Thus they call upon those in authority, and all decision and policy makers, to exert every effort in order to enforce the necessary legislation and take every necessary measure to protect Christians in all the countries of the Middle East and around the world.

12-In this regard, the General Assembly also calls upon all the adherents of the three monotheistic religions to interact with each other in the spirit of love – in thought and in deed. The principles of common serious dialogue between

followers of all religions ought to be respected and put into practice. It endorses and asserts the need to continue with all dialogue initiatives currently taking place between Christians and Muslims, whether on the level of every-day life or within the context of institutions and dialogue centers.

13-Muslims and Christians in the Middle East have journeyed together as sisters and brothers for many decades, and we shall continue to do so. Together we stand before God Almighty in the service of the people of our region and of the world; but also in service of our societies who are currently experiencing fundamental political and constitutional changes. We strongly urge that the principles of equal citizenship shall be incorporated into the emerging constitutions and *effectively applied* on the ground in all our countries.

14-As the Middle East Council of Churches brings its General Assembly to a close, it wishes again to thank his Beatitude the Archbishop of Cyprus and to endorse what he said in his opening speech to the Assembly. We join him in calling for the unity of the Island of Cyprus and for respect and protection of the basic human rights and freedoms of its inhabitants, but in particular the right of religious practice and worship, and the preservation of the ancient and historic churches and monasteries on the Island that have been destroyed or desecrated.

15-Finally, the Assembly extends its thanks to the outgoing General Secretary, the presidents, the members of the Executive Committee and the staff who have faithfully labored for the preservation of MECC in the past four years.

16-As our Churches prepare to celebrate the feast of the nativity of our Lord Jesus Christ in the flesh, we assert our hope for our region and for the whole world. We leave the Assembly inspired by the chant of the angelic host on Christmas night: ***“Glory to God in the highest, peace on earth***

and hope to all people of good will."

Chief Secretary's Office