

Evangelisch-reformierte Kirche

- Moderamen der Gesamtsynode -



To the Supreme Council of the Evangelical Community in Syria and Lebanon

Reply to Urgent Appeal

Dear church leaders in the war-torn region of the Middle East,
from Syria, Iraq and Lebanon,

I.

Dear sisters and brothers,
your dramatic appeal of 29 August 2014 reached our Evangelical Reformed Church in Germany last year. We were shaken and shocked by your words, and still are. Since summer last year your situation has not improved but has at many points deteriorated and become more urgent.

(1) You portray the desperate situation of Christians at many places in the region. You describe how our brothers and sisters in faith are being hunted, abused, humiliated and murdered in their hundreds of thousands by Islamist militias. Along with them, other minorities in the region such as the Yezidi are experiencing such horrors, and also the majority of moderate Muslims. Hundreds of thousands of people are fleeing, hundreds of thousands are stuck in the war area and face death every day.

(2) As church leaders in the war region you have declared a state of emergency in view of the persecution and killing of your church members and urgently appeal for our assistance. You report of the threat to your existence, of the beginnings of genocide. You fear that Christians and their communities will completely disappear from the Middle East.

(3) Summarising your words, we hear this appeal to us: "Sisters and brothers in faith, our lives and survival are threatened. Do all you can to tie the hands of the murderers and warmongers. Strengthen the churches in this region. Help us to meet the needs of the refugees. And not least: Support the reconstruction of civil society."

(4) With great respect we note that you are not concerned only for the survival of Christians and their communities in the region. Rather, as Christian churches, you see it as your responsibility to be ambassadors of a culture of love, peace and human rights in your region, thereby fostering peaceful coexistence in diversity.

(5) We churches in the European context stand up not only for the freedom of Christian faith but, at the same time, for freedom of religion for all people and the peaceful coexistence of people of different origins and backgrounds. In our region, too, fanatics show their contempt for such tolerance, unfortunately time and again evidencing hate against the Jews living among us.

After a history of our own incalculable guilt towards the Jews we resolutely oppose all forms of anti-Semitism, wherever and however it is expressed.

(6) You draw the strength for your commitment from the love of God, as manifested so really and tangibly on the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ. This love of God moves you to bear witness in solidarity with the people who are suffering such death and destruction through the wars in the Middle East.

(7) The love of God also drives you forward in your social commitment to communal life with people of other faiths, of whom you speak, in the spirit of our Lord Jesus Christ, as your “Muslim brothers and sisters”. We are one with you in the spirit of God’s love and in the spirit of the resultant social and political commitment.

II.

Your appeal prompts us to respond as follows:

(1) We will regularly inform our congregations about your situation. Furthermore, we will call on our churches and all our members to pray for you, our sisters and brothers in distress.

(2) We urge those responsible in our country to take political initiatives to improve the situation of the Christians in the Middle East. We do not intend to allow our politicians to lose sight of your fate in view of other crisis spots in the world.

(3) We call on those responsible to cut off reinforcements, supplies and sources of finance from the IS terrorists. That includes e.g. trading in crude oil, selling antiques and the business of hostage-taking. We will continue to ask until we receive satisfactory replies to the question of whether really everything has been done to isolate the terrorists and their accomplices - politically and economically.

We call for doing all that is possible under the rule of law to prevent violent Islamist fanatics from Europe from travelling to your region to join in the war against you. We support prevention measures to preserve young people from falling under the influence of fanatical religious and political views.

(4) We are divided on the question of whether the opponents of the IS should be provided with more weapons. Some fear that more weapons in your region, already bristling with arms, will add fuel to the flames. Others counter that we cannot stand idly by when our brothers and sisters in Christ are being murdered and kidnapped.

We take the position that every use of weapons – as a last resort - in a war-torn region should be checked to see whether it is suited to defending or restoring a peace order, freedom and the rule of law. That requires clear political guidance from international bodies. Above all, we urge that such interventions be mandated by the United Nations.

(5) We advocate and support a long-term strategy to promote schooling and the retention of educational institutions in your region. Education is an essential expression of Christian life. Through learning and education societies change for the better, gaining stability and the capacity for reform.

Everywhere we urge that children and young people of different geographical, social or religious origin are offered the same opportunities for participation. Their individual life circumstances should be considered in this regard, as well as how they can practise living together and developing solid relationships in society.

(6) We support assistance for refugees from your communities in our country. We want to welcome them as sisters and brothers and work to ensure that they find protection in Germany. Many of our church congregations have put such assistance and support programmes high on their agenda. Last year, our Evangelical Reformed Church decided to establish a special fund for work with refugees and made it available to the congregations. However, we are aware that most of the refugees wish to return to their home countries one day, in peace.

(7) We will push for comprehensive and sustainable assistance to be provided in your region, through which e.g. Welthungerhilfe, the UNHCR, Diakonie Germany and Bread for the World can contribute to alleviating your hardship too.

We would particularly like to support the appeal for the Al-Nash' Al-Jadeed ("the new humanity") Evangelical School of our Evangelical Reformed sisters and brothers in Aleppo, Syria and will ask our local churches and their members to hold a special collection for this cause.

We will not forget you!

May the peace of God be with us all.

Emden, 17. April 2015



Norbert Nordholt
Präses of General Synod



Dr. Martin Heimbucher
Church President

Sent through:

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