



Middle East Mediterranean

An ELIAMEP Report

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**The
multicultural
model of
Europe**
Evangelos Venetis

**What must be
done**
Eleftherios
Mastrotheodoros

Focus on Christianity

An interview with

**H.E. Ierotheos,
Bishop of
Nafpaktos and
Saint Vlassios**

*Monitoring
the Middle East*

Protecting Multiculturalism in the Middle East and Europe

The Christians of the Levant and
their importance for the Eastern
Mediterranean

Aref al-Obeid

The Greek Muslims of Lebanon
and Syria

Efi Lasithiotakis

Middle East Mediterranean

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Middle East Mediterranean (MEM) is an unbiased bimonthly report of the *ELIAMEP Middle East Research Project*, focusing largely on geopolitical and economic developments, debates as well as policies, affecting the future of the Middle East. Having a global outlook MEM hosts analyses, commentaries, interviews and news, conducting research in the fields of politics, economics and culture in the Middle East and adjacent areas, such as the Eastern Mediterranean.

NOTICE: The views expressed in the articles of the *Middle East Mediterranean* do not reflect the point of view of the Hellenic Institute for European and Foreign Policy and the Editorial Team.

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Editor's Note

The unfolding status of insecurity both in Europe regarding the Muslim communities and the Middle East concerning the Non-Muslim communities has underlined the challenges that concepts such as cultural coexistence and mutual respect in a global environment are facing today both in Europe and the Middle East as a result of the conflict between religious extremism and secularism. The recent attacks both in the West and the persecution of religious minorities in the Middle East put at risk the global model of mutual cultural respect. These events manifest now more than ever the importance of dialogue of civilizations and intercultural understanding.

The deterioration of the security situation in the Middle East in the aftermath of the so-called “Arab Spring” has brought to light now more than ever the phenomenon of the lack of physical security for various religions and sects in the Middle East. Religions, such as Christianity, face the prospect of extinction in terms of numbers from the region. The migration of hundreds of thousands of Christians from Mesopotamia in the last decade manifests the extent and severity of this human catastrophe. The same is the case for other religions such as Judaism and (branches of) Islam. Apparently the emergency of this deteriorating situation calls for the active interest and involvement of the international community in order to prevent further escalation of violence and lack of respect for basic human rights, such as the freedom of religion.

The current issue of the Middle East Mediterranean focuses on various aspects of safeguarding multiculturalism in the Middle East, such as the issue of Christianity in Syria and Lebanon, the multicultural example of Egypt as a case study for other societies in the region and the proposed policy that Greece, Europe and the Middle Eastern governments need to agree on and implement to make multiculturalism sustainable.

MEM

Analyses

The Christians of the Levant and their importance for Eastern Mediterranean

Aref Alobeid, PhD
Independent Expert in Middle Eastern Affairs

This paper analyses the historical background of relations between Muslims and Christians in the region. It is argued that the Arabs in the Middle East are not only Muslims; without the Christians, they would be poorer as Arabs.

The important issue of the Eastern Mediterranean Christians' plight deserves more research and study by academics and researchers as there is shortage of information and knowledge and limited bibliography.

At the end of the 19th century and the early 20th century, the vision of a modern Arab nation emerging after the withdrawal of the Ottomans (1516-1918) from the Arab-speaking areas imposed the need for cooperation between the Muslim and Christian populations. However, the two allied European powers, France and Great Britain destroyed that vision of the two communities with the conquest of the Eastern Mediterranean Region from 1916 until the end of the Second World War.

The emergence of new Arab countries after 1945 meant a new struggle between the Christian and the Muslim communities regarding their common future, especially in

the countries of Great Syria¹ where large Christian communities of different doctrines lived.² Thus, the postwar period was characterized by this intense Christian activity.

In the case of Lebanon, the Christians were the majority and this justified their monopoly of the position of the President of the Republic (always a Christian Maronite). Despite the fact that later the Christian community became a minority, the president of the country remains to this date a Christian as a national tradition.³

In the case of Syria there are major Christian personalities who distinguished themselves in the political and academic arena, such as

¹ Includes modern Syria, Lebanon, Palestine, Jordan and a part of Iraq

² For instance, Orthodox, Catholics, Protestants, Old Syrians, Assyrians, Latinos, Maronites, Armenians and Copts

³ The appointment of a Christian president on a permanent basis is not mandated by the country's constitution, but is based on the National Contract-agreement which signed between the political forces following the departure of the French.

Michael Aflaq - founder of the Baath party that governs the country from 1963 until today. Also, the coexistence and reconciliation between Christians and Muslims were such that defied every moral barrier in placing the first Christian Minister of religions, Faris Al Khoury, in Syria in 1946, although Christians were vastly outnumbered by Muslims. After eight years Al Khoury became the country's prime minister without of course any change in the demographics in favor of the Christians.⁴

However, there are detrimental factors that influenced the relations between Christians and Muslims and caused the flight of Christians living in the Eastern Mediterranean.

Firstly, the conversion of the Muslim minority to majority, because of the policy applied during the expansion of Islam; With the conversion to Islam, young believers, regardless of ethnicity, acquired the same rights with Muslim Arabs, even the right of government, while Christians are deprived of such possibility.

Secondly, the discontent of the Muslim community against the Christians increased because of the Crusades. Since the time of the Crusades the Muslims gave to the

whole of Christianity a characteristic of 'enmity' toward Islam and Arabism⁵, while the same did not apply to Jews.

Thirdly, the establishment of the State of Israel in 1948 and the ensuing Arab-Israeli Conflict were the reasons that caused over 20 crises and led to a new wave of immigration to the West.⁶

Fourthly, poor to miserable living conditions prevailed in the region, because of policies that had been implemented by authoritarian regimes, especially after 1967.⁷

Finally, intrinsic factors that contributed to the decline of the Christian populations in the Eastern Mediterranean include the loss of the social role of the Church. Because of this, the social contract in the church converted to an incomplete contract and reflects the model of authoritarian administration, which in any case is not consistent with the true meaning of Christianity⁸

In conclusion, it is clearly demonstrated that the Arabs in the Middle East are not only Muslims; without the Christians, they would be poorer as Arabs.

⁴ For more information about "The role of Christians of the Eastern Mediterranean in the emergence of the Arab Enlightenment and Nationalism" See. Kleantes Kyriakides & Alobeid Aref in the journal International and European Policy, Issue 31.

⁵ Laurent Chabry and Annie Chabry, Minorities in the Middle East, Thetili, translation Evi Nantsou, p 20-21

⁶ BBC, Statement of the Patriarch of Antioch for the Roman Catholics, Gregory Laham, 05/12/2013.

⁷ This factor pushed millions of Muslims and Christians to emigrate, however, because Christians are a minority the problem takes larger dimensions.

⁸ Spyridon Tanous, Orthodox Patristic Church - Sweden, Word of Truth, Fragmentation of Christians in Syria and MENA, <http://wt-wordtruth.blogspot.gr/2014/02/fragmentation-of-christians-in-syria.html>

The Greek Muslims of Syria and Lebanon

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This paper focuses on the current condition of the Greek Muslims of Hamidiyah in Syria and Tripoli in Lebanon after they had been relocated in late 19th c. from Crete to the Levant. Their presence in the region constitutes a major aspect of Greek cultural presence at a time of strong insecurity due to the Syrian civil war.

The Greek Muslim community in Syria and Lebanon consists of the descendants of the Islamized Greek population of Crete during the Ottoman times, and later, who after the union of Crete with the rest of Greece, withdrew from the island, bound for the coast of Turkey, Syria, Lebanon, Egypt and Libya. Although the departure of the Muslim population from Crete began from 1875 onwards, legally these populations are included in the Exchange of Populations after 1922.

Tripoli, the second largest city and the major industrial center in north of Lebanon, has a population of 500,000. About 7.000 residents of Tripoli are allegedly of Greek origin and have knowledge of the Greek language which they learnt from the Greek Muslims of Mina, the seaport close to Tripoli.

In the case of Lebanon, the Christians were the majority and this justified their monopoly of the Position of the President of the Republic (always a Christian

Maronite). Despite the fact that later the Christian community became a minority, the president of the country remains to this date a Christian as a national tradition.⁹

In Syria the main settlement of the community is the Hamidiyah, a village of 5.000 inhabitants in South Syria. The nearest city to the village is Tartus, the second largest port city of Syria, with a population of approximately 115,000 inhabitants. Tartus is four hours by bus far from Damascus, and the village is 20 minutes drive south of Tartus. The Hamidiyah is 3 km. away from the borders of Lebanon, but the journey from Tripoli to the village takes an hour and a half -and sometimes more so because of border controls.

The fact that Greek Muslims have settled themselves in coastal areas not only does it remind them of their Cretan past but it is also an

⁹ The appointment of a Christian president on a permanent basis is not mandated by the country's constitution, but is based on the National Contract-agreement which signed between the political forces following the departure of the French.

important feature related to their prosperity, security and openness as society.

The Syrian war

The ongoing civil war in Syria has strong impact on population in every corner of the country, both in areas with or without military activity. In the case of Hamidiyah it is close to one of the major fronts at the city of Homs and Qusayr in central Syria. The recent deterioration of security in the Idlib province in North Syria sends a warning signal to the Greek Muslims in Hamidiyah about their security.

Even if their security status is not the worse in the country, their humanitarian condition calls for the immediate international aid of various organizations. Presumably a portion of the Greek Muslim population of Hamidiyah has moved to North Lebanon in Mina and Tripoli looking for the help of relatives and fellow compatriots and coreligionists there.

Another unknown number of Greek Muslims of Syria has been forced to abandon their land and seek refuge in other neighboring countries including the coastal areas of Turkey and the islands of Greece. According to some sources a number of them have already reached Greece through illegal migration routes looking for a new life in Crete or

other regions of their mother land. Already long before the eruption of the Syrian civil war a number of a few hundreds of Greek Muslims of Syria and Lebanon were working in various cities of Crete.

As a whole, there are some key points driven by the views of the members of the community of Greek Muslims of Tripoli Lebanon: i) The social power of the community is enough to guarantee its reproduction and duration for over more than century; ii) The departure from Crete is seen by community members as a traumatic experience. The community itself but also the environment in which they live refers to them as refugees-immigrants; iii) Through their stories, history, people and sites being redeveloped as part of an Islamic reality. Religious and national identities are formed within the framework of the Ottoman succession in the history of the community and the present socio-political situation in Lebanon; iv) The community members have retained positive images of life on Crete, the island and its people; v) The collective memories offer an alternative memory for the history of Crete, which allow us a more complete picture of the history of Crete.

The aforementioned developments highlight the tendency of the Greek Muslims of Syria and Lebanon to be in touch with Crete and Greece as a whole as a result of

their collective memory about their origin and cultural identity. Despite the constant exposure to various dangers and adversities as well as the feeling of marginalization and abandonment they have in Syria as a result of the war, they remain vividly steadfast in retaining their identity, including the use of the Greek language in the form of Cretan dialects. This multidimensional identity of the Greek Muslims makes them a unique example of cultural syncretism in the Eastern Mediterranean and a major live aspect of eastern Greek civilization nowadays.

Comments

Envisaging the multicultural model of Europe

Dr. Evangelos Venetis

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The main challenge for Europe is the social integration of Muslims while preserving cultural and religious diversity during the economic crisis and social unrest in the European continent.

The recent deterioration of relations between Islam and Europe as a result of three causes: The marginalized Muslim communities in Europe and the socio-economic developments in the continent; the lack of adequate inter-cultural understanding; and the geopolitical insecurity in the Middle East.

Regarding the first case, it should be mentioned that while Europe is undergoing a severe economic crisis, the Muslim communities suffer the same hardships with the indigenous population. The deterioration of economy can lead to social unrest which can facilitate the emergence of ultra right-wing ideology in the social and political spectrum of Europe. In such an unstable environment, the

role of Muslims in Europe is diminished and could be endangered if the overall situation deteriorates further. Subsequently, the social and economic marginalisation of Muslims in Europe in combination with the emergence of ultra right wing ideology and an Islamophobic mentality, can give the opportunity to extreme political Islam flourish further amongst European Muslims.

Similarly the Non-Muslim communities in the Middle East suffer from social marginalization and expulsion involving insecurity and constant violation of their basic rights. The preservation of these communities in the Middle East is a means of preserving multiculturalism and freedom, both individual and collective.

Regarding intercultural understanding it is worth pointing out that extremism is threatening security in the Middle East and Europe. Extremists rely on the ignorance of Europe about the civilization of Islam and the worldview of the Muslim residents in Europe. Whilst Muslim immigrants are invited to know the European culture and civilization as a whole and particularly in each European country, they realize that Europeans ignore the basics about Islam regarding its worldview, scientific and historical achievements. This lack of mutuality in terms of knowledge is the cause for many cultural stereotypes against Islam and misunderstandings between Muslims and Non-Muslims in Europe. Such stereotypes can contribute to the formation of an anti-Islam attitude of Europe in a social and cultural framework.

Similarly the states in the Middle East are invited to take measures in order to protect the security and welfare of the Non-Muslim communities in their territory. The role of extremists threatens not only the Non-Muslim communities but also the secular and moderate profile and domestic policy of Muslim states. This policy is the basis of communal peace and cultural tolerance.

As for the geopolitical reality in the Middle East, the EU policy in the Middle East led to the destabilization of Mesopotamia and the Levant. The fall of Saddam in Iraq (2003) and the Syrian civil war (2011) have created a power vacuum in the region leading to the emergence of the Islamic Caliphate, the benchmark for most Sunni Islamists worldwide. The other main geopolitical dimension of the events of Paris is the Israel-Palestine unresolved conflict which is the pinnacle of political Islam in the region, inspiring Islamic holy war regionally and globally.

Having the aforementioned in mind, it is necessary to have Europe essentially engaged in a long and necessary process for addressing the ongoing challenges. The main challenge for Europe is the integration of Muslims while preserving cultural and religious diversity during the economic crisis and social unrest in Europe. In this context Brussels must focus on the fields of education, security, human rights and geopolitics. Additionally, the formation of a stable EU domestic and foreign policy are necessary prerequisites for integrating the Muslim communities in the European future.

What must be done: Ensuring religious diversity in the Middle East

Eleftherios Mastrotheodoros, MA

The Social Media Project

ELIAMEP, Yeniköy Virgin Mary Greek Orthodox Church and School

The international community needs to display keen interest in order to develop a plan to address the problem of violations of religious freedom in the Middle East. Active cooperation is needed to ensure the basic human rights of Christians and other religions in the region.

Given the growing status of insecurity threatening multiculturalism in the Middle East, Africa and the Mediterranean Sea it is worth mentioning that the dramatic reduction in the number of Christians in the Middle East combined with the blatant violation of human rights at the level of religious tolerance and freedom of speech, security of lives and property of Christians and other religions of the region, including Islam, are worrisome events that need to be addressed. Greece could have a central role in a European context in this process.

The issue of religious freedom in the Middle East and Africa is interconnected with illegal migration. Both phenomena are related amongst other things with regional extremism. A number of the migrants coming to Europe are

groups of every religion, mainly, Christians and Muslims of every denomination. Apparently the northern European countries have displayed less attention in regard to observing, focusing, analyzing and eventually being active in addressing this situation adequately and effectively. Facing the growing influx of illegal migrants the countries of the European South are keener to act but they cannot do so alone; they need the cooperation and consent of the other EU members.

Obviously there is a gap between reality on the ground and the decision-making framework of Europe. Hence it is urgent to unfold this issue at a conference in a European context. The topic of the conference must refer to the humanitarian crisis of Christians in Syria, Iraq and Libya is growing and it demands for an urgent response.

The necessary steps for the restoration of security and stability of the life of these communities are related to the registration and identification of Christian refugees who are inside and outside their country. Moreover it is important to highlight the humanitarian aid to Christian refugees staying in camps in the country of origin or to neighboring countries. This assistance is analyzed at level of health (medicines, healthcare), food, clothing, and security in regard to their lives and their property.

There must be a provision for the return of Christian refugees in their ancestral land through specific

programs at the level of international organizations and the multinational regional level between the EU and specific regional states in the Middle East. This provision must be combined with the formation of an economic fund coming from different international sources. These steps must be supervised by an international management committee with members from all parties interested in contributing in this process. This effort needs a long term planning and implementation in order to have fruitful results concerning the preservation of multiculturalism in the region. 



Focus on *Christianity in the Middle East*

Religions, such as Christianity, face the prospect of extinction in terms of numbers from the Middle East as a result of the deterioration of regional security in the aftermath of the so-called “Arab Spring.” The migration of hundreds of thousands of Christians from Mesopotamia in the last decade manifests the extent and severity of this human catastrophe. Apparently the emergency of this deteriorating process calls for the active involvement of the international community in order to prevent further escalation of violence and lack of respect for basic human rights, such as the freedom of religion.

In this context, H.E. Ierotheos, Bishop of Nafpaktos and Saint Vlassios highlights in his interview major points related to the importance of dialogue of civilizations and intercultural understanding.

Q: *How do you see the present and the future of Christians in the Middle East?*

A: I must start with the view that the presence of Christians (Orthodox and other confessions) in the Middle East is important for the balance of the region. Additionally, Christians existed in the region before the arrival of the Arabs and Muslims, which is a historical fact.

Unfortunately, I notice the continuous reduction of the Christian population in this region due to the existing state of war and especially due to the violence of

extremist Muslims against Christians and the Muslim population who think differently from them. The present and the future is bleak and I admire Patriarch John of Antioch, the Bishops, the Clergy and monks and generally the Christians who remain in the region and work to bring peace there. This is indeed a hope of life. However, the slogan "annihilate the Christians" is tragic.

Q: *Has Europe done enough to protect them?*

A: I see no substantive move Europe to protect them, as I have repeatedly heard Patriarch John of Antioch

asking anxiously their intervention to stop the endless bloodbath in the region.

I would go as far as to say that I think this time in the Middle East the Asia Minor catastrophe and tragedy is being completed. It is known that the Asia Minor catastrophe in 1922 for the Greek-speaking Rum (Roman) population was worse than the fall of Constantinople in 1453, because as a result of it the entire Rum population vanished from the area. Now the same is happening in the Middle East, where there are still Arabic-speaking Rum inhabitants.

And the worst is that as then, so today European leaders remain “impassive”, as if they wanted this for various reasons. I also have a major question: Where do the Mujahedin find large sums of money to buy modern weapons and ammunition; and even if they do have various sources of funding, then who is responsible for their supply?

Q: *What are the needs of the Greek Orthodox population in Syria and Lebanon?*

A: The difficult conditions in the region show their particular needs. The information we have is that there are problems in regard to the safety of their life, the safety of their property, freedom to fulfill their religious needs, as well as their free movement in different regions, even within their countries. There are problems everywhere.

In some cases they face serious dilemmas such as whether to

change their faith or to leave their homes or to pay unbearable taxes. The living conditions are appalling. Finally, the deprivation of liberty, which is protected by the International Human Rights Accord is violated daily. Beyond these there are basic humanitarian needs such as food, medicine and health care.

War and civil strife create deep wounds in people. This is clearly shown by mass exoduses from their country, with their exploitation by traffickers and under difficult conditions. The Mediterranean Sea is red with human blood. And the fact is that many of the so-called “refugees” and “immigrants” prefer the risk of death or drowning in the sea, rather than stay at home and suffer a tragic end as a result of violence. This situation reflects the needs of these people.

Q: *Your recent book titled “Mission to Syria and Lebanon” highlights the multicultural and complex reality of the life of Christians there. What are your main experiences and lessons from your stay there?*

A: I was active in Lebanon and Syria in the period 1988-1991 during the Lebanese civil war, when Syria was ruled by the dictatorial regime of Hafez al-Assad, the father of the current President. Of course, northern Lebanon was occupied by Syria and there was a relative lull, albeit there were daily security incidents.

My experiences were many, because I saw people suffering from

hunger and other shortages; I saw everywhere the pain of the loss of people dear to them, but I also saw the hope of the people for a better tomorrow.

Besides that, two points impressed me the most:

First of all, the Orthodox Christians define themselves as Romans (Rum) and this notion expresses their identity. I was surprised to notice that, while they did not know the Greek language, they wished to have the hymns in their church services sung both in Arabic and Greek. And when I asked them why, they said that they like it because it shows their identity, that they are descendants of the Roman (Byzantine) Empire.

The second point is that there was a peaceful coexistence between the Christian and the Muslim populations in Syria and Lebanon prior to the war; a coexistence between Romans and Muslims. However, we must note that the extremist type of military Islam did not exist. It is an alien element imported into the region. This is a significant and revealing point.

Everywhere the local population, Christians and Muslims, received me with respect, perhaps because I was a Greek-speaking Rum, and when I had to go to the doctor, they would let me take their place, as a token of respect for my priesthood.

Q: *Is the involvement of Greece and the international community to protect the Greek Orthodox and other Christians of Syria necessary?*

Greece should, in my opinion, be active for many reasons. First, because we have an affinity between us, since we are Rum Christians and they consider us their brothers. Usually the prevailing opinion among us is that we Greeks are a “brotherless” nation. This view is wrong, because Rum populations exist in all parts of the earth, especially in the Middle East. When one reads the history of the two peoples, one finds that we share common struggles, common sacrifices and the same pain. When I went to the Middle East I received the respect of the people, and they loved the Greeks, viewing us as their brothers.

Additionally, we have a duty to take action on humanitarian grounds, because people are suffering and being tortured; and every human being is a creation of God. I was pleased to learn that the Minister of Foreign Affairs in the present government of Greece is active on the issue of the presence of Christians in the Middle East and he has visited Archbishop Hieronymus of Athens and All Greece for this purpose. No doubt he has a plan that needs to become a reality.

Greece has a major geographical position between East and West: it is the West of the East and the East of the West. After all we should not devote all our efforts only to economic problems, but have to deal with issues concerning our wider region in order to acquire an important position in geopolitical strategies, which also play a major role in economic matters.

Q: *What does Greece need to do in order to offer humanitarian aid to the Christians of the Middle East?*

Greece has always supported the region on many levels. First, the Greek Government through the Foreign Ministry has always contributed to covering the cost of running the Balamand Theological School of the Patriarchate of Antioch in northern Lebanon. This School supplied the Patriarchate with capable Clergy, who worked courageously as pastors in war areas. The operation of the Theological School enabled its students to learn the Greek language and the Rum tradition. Greek-speaking clergy, such as the current Patriarch John of Antioch, play an important role in bringing peace to these areas. This must continue.

Secondly, in consultation with the Patriarchate of Antioch, humanitarian aid, and anything else that is needed, should be sent. Of course, prayer is essential to ask God to bestow on them strength and courage to face every difficulty. Every time I celebrate the Liturgy I commemorate our brothers in the Middle East who endure all sorts of trials.

In order to assist the Orthodox population in the Middle East effectively, an International Conference should be held in Athens, which will get to the heart of the problem and will inform public opinion in Greece and the West about the seriousness of the problem. Many useful points could come out of this conference and proposals would be drawn up which

would awaken people to assist the Christians caught up in war.

It is true that many Greeks do not understand the real situation in these areas. Readers of my book “Mission in the Middle East (Lebanon and Syria)” told me that they were not aware of what is happening in these areas, nor of the existence of the Rum population to this degree. Additionally, local churches must assist the Patriarchate of Antioch in various ways.

Q: *Today would you return to Syria and Lebanon or request to have a priest sent to meet the needs of the community there?*

If I were younger and did not have my current responsibilities, I would return to the region. I never regretted going to Lebanon and Syria, despite the difficulties I encountered, because my acquaintance with these people and their tradition enriched me with many experiences. Today I would regret it, if I had rejected the proposal to go to the Middle East then. I think that my activity in the region is one of the most important experiences in my life.

A year ago, on the occasion of the enthronement of my dear friend Patriarch John of Antioch, whom I know since we both taught at the Balamand Theological School, I went to Beirut, and I was delighted to meet many of my students who are now Bishops, Priests and Teachers in the Theological School.

On the question of whether I would send a Priest to meet the

needs of the community there, it is up to the local Church Authorities to issue such a request. The Priest who is to be sent would need to have a personal wish to go, as well as special knowledge and skills.

Q: *What is your message to the Greek Orthodox Communities in Syria and Lebanon?*

I do not know if I have the right to send messages to those who are in the front line risking their lives, and are sacrificed daily to preserve their faith and out of love for their homeland and their brothers. I do not know if I have the right to advise them, when they live martyrdom every day and I remain in quiet and peaceful places. What I can say is that I think of them every day and pray for them, I love them with pain in my heart. I pray that God give them strength, health, patience, fortitude and love towards everyone. I know that they have stable faith, love for God and the Church and do the best they possibly can. We think of them as brothers and pray for them.

Q: *What is the context of assistance that the Christians of the Middle East need and how could the supply conditions be ensured?*

I have already said that an International Conference should be organized in Athens, and its conclusions would help in future action.

Much can be done, such as recording and identifying the Christian refugees who were forced to leave their homes and are located both inside and outside their country, and the provision of humanitarian assistance to Christian refugees, as well as making provision for the return of Christian refugees to their homes. This initiative must be safeguarded with the help of the governments of Middle Eastern countries, the local states and international organizations. They need to take concerted action to tackle the serious difficulties.

Generally, there is a need to eliminate the causes that create war and make people refugees. I consider that the main reason is the injustices that have occurred in the region and the interventions by foreign powers for their own economic and political ends.

Q: *What is the role of the World Council of Churches?*

Usually, the “World Council of Churches” is interested in “dogmatic minimalism” to justify its existence, and many religious confessions that are members of the organization are responsible for this situation, since their missions are used for nationalistic purposes. Anyway, Christians in the West must understand that the Christians inhabitants in the Middle East are suffering today due to major persecutions. The ancient martyrdoms are repeated; Christians are decapitated and tortured in various ways; churches are destroyed. An ancient Christian

population is vanishing from this region.

That is why Christians should be active in every direction, mainly towards the Christian peoples, to protect all the Christians of the Middle East of every confession, and to offer major humanitarian aid. However, it is unfortunate, as

Patriarch John of Antioch has repeatedly protested, that many Western Christians remain indifferent or silent about this great slaughter and catastrophe in the region, while they protest when one of their own people is arrested.

Thus the plight of Christians in the Middle East must become our own concern and our own prayer.

Monitoring the Middle East

Afghanistan

The London Conference on Afghanistan (4, Dec., 2014)

The London Conference on Afghanistan took place on 4 December 2014, co-hosted by the governments of the UK and Afghanistan. Associated events took place during the afternoon and evening of Wednesday 3 December. The Conference provided a platform for the government of Afghanistan to set out its vision for reform and for the international community to demonstrate enduring solidarity and support for Afghanistan.

Algeria

The army killed the leader of "Jude Al-Khalifa" (24, Dec., 2014)

The Algerian army confirmed today that during the night it killed the leader of the armed group "Jude Al-Khalifa" ("Soldiers of the Caliphate"), which is responsible for the kidnapping and beheading of the French tourist Herve Gkourntel September, according to a statement in the possession of the French Agency. As confirmed by the army in an operation conducted in Isere, 60 km. east of Algiers, which killed "three terrorists", "confirmed the identity of the dangerous criminal Ampntelmalek Guri, who had claimed responsibility for the murder of Frenchman Herve Gkourntel."

Bahrain

US concern over detention of Bahraini opposition leader (31 Dec., 2014)

The State Department expressed deep concern about the detention of opposition leader of Bahrain, Sheikh Ali Salman, warning that his arrest may exacerbate tensions in this kingdom Gulf. Sheikh Ali Salman, the Secretary General of the Shiite party al Ouefak, He was arrested Sunday after he led a protest against the elections held in November in Bahrain, which the party had boycott. Tuesday ordered his detention for another week. "The opposition parties who peacefully criticize governments They play a vital role in pluralistic states and societies ", said in yesterday's statement the State Department.

Cyprus

No exploitable hydrocarbon found in "Onasagorou" deposit (27 Sept., 2014)

There was no exploitable hydrocarbon concentration found in the first exploratory drilling consortium ENI / KOGAS to deposit "Onasagorou" the research piece 9 of the Cypriot EEZ, according to preliminary results announced by the Cyprus Ministry of Energy. According to the announcement, the consortium is completing these days the exploratory drilling in the "Onasagoras" and proceeds to the next drilling the deposit under the name "Amathusa". The drilling at the deposit "Onasagorou", which were drilled with the drilling rig SAIPEM 10000,

reached its planned depth of 5,800 meters. The consortium ENI / KOGAS processes and evaluates all elements geological and other data, collected during the first drilling and which will be very helpful for continuity. H processing and evaluation of data collected, take some time because of the complexity geological system of the area.

Egypt

Egyptian and Qatari officials meet in Cairo (20 Dec., 2014)

Executives of Egyptian intelligence and Qatar met in Cairo to discuss the reconciliation process of the two sides, a diplomatic effort in which the role of mediator played by Saudi Arabia and aims to end the 18-month Bilateral conflict because the Doha supported the Muslim Brotherhood. Security sources and diplomats said that the head of intelligence of Qatar, Ahmed bin Nasser Al Thani Jasem, participated in the talks, which came under discussion a possible meeting of heads of state of Egypt and Qatar in either curry or in Riyadh in early 2015.

Iran

Iran-Iraq sign defense MoU (31 Dec., 2014)

The Defense Minister of Iran Hossein Dehgan and the Iraqi counterpart Khaled al-Obeidi signed a memorandum of understanding, under which Tehran would help Baghdad to reinforce the army, announced today the Iranian Defense Ministry. "In this memorandum, defined the various areas of cooperation in defense matters and agreed to continue cooperation for the establishment of an Iraqi national army to protect the territorial integrity and security of Iraq. The two sides also stressed the need for regular consultations to examine the ways of such security in the region, as well as terrorism affects not only the security in Iraq but the entire region." Dehgan said, "Iraq and Syria suffer today from terrorism and natural Iran and Iraq should reinforce their cooperation in addressing this threat," reported the news agency Fars. Tehran denies the presence of its troops in Iraq, but admitted that it has sent weapons and military advisers in its neighboring country. However, the Islamic Republic is not participating in the US-international coalition against Sunni Wahabbi Mujahedeen.

Iraq

Iraqi Kurdistan and Iran strengthen ties (19 Dec., 2014)

The government of semi-autonomous province of the Iraqi Kurdistan plans to strengthen its relations with Iran, announced the head of today, whilst acknowledging the deepening of ties between Arbil and Tehran. The prime minister of the government of Iraqi Kurdistan Netsirvan Barzani said in a statement issued that the new agreement between Arbil and Baghdad on oil will not affect ties with Iraqi Kurds in Turkey or Iran. "We will continue to strengthen our relationship with our eastern neighbor, Iran," Barzani said in a statement which was distributed at an event for oil and gas organized by Kurds in London. The statement was read by Sir Jeremy Greenstock, former British ambassador to the UN, after Barzani was unable to attend the event.

Lebanon

The future of the Lebanese hostages of ISIS (25 Sept., 2014)

Lebanese police and soldiers kidnapped by Sunni Mujahedeen will be saved if Beirut release all Muslims who have been arrested and are related to the war in Syria, including the former wife of the leader of the Islamic State, announced today a mediator. The Salafist sheik Ouisam al Masri negotiating for several weeks to release 25 soldiers and policemen kidnapped by the IK and the Front al Nosra, the offshoot of Al Qaeda in Syria. The Lebanese were kidnapped in early August in eastern Lebanon and to date four hostages have been executed. In a press conference in Beirut the Masri said that the ISIS conveyed a message, according to which the Mujahedeen bound not to execute the hostages if they continue negotiations with the authorities.

Libya

Helicopter shot down in Libya (31 Dec., 2014)

A helicopter was shot down, one of the major oil export terminal stations continues to be on fire, an attack with a car bomb occurred outside the temporary seat of parliament: Libya continues today to be in the grip of violence and conflict for power, that seem to lead to the outbreak of a new, totalitarian civil war. The Libyan air force shot down a helicopter today paramilitary forces, were making airstrike against one of the main oil export terminal stations in the east, where several tanks are still on fire today, officials said.

Morocco

Clashes between students and police (27 Dec., 2014)

The clashes erupted Monday between protesting students and enforcement forces of order on a campus in Oujda (Northeast) resulted injured "at least 100" People, especially in the ranks of the police forces, according to a new account that released today by the press. The number of wounded "is around 100, including 62 men's auxiliary forces, many of whom have admitted to intensive care units. A police officer was seriously injured and "lost an eye", said a member of the local branch of the Union Moroccan Human Rights (AMDH).

Palestine - Israel

Luxembourg to recognize officially the Palestinian State (18 Dec., 2014)

The Parliament of Luxembourg voted today a proposal that calls on the government of Prime Minister Xavier Betel recognize "officially" the Palestinian State, following the example of the parliaments of France, Britain, Spain, Ireland and Portugal. The proposal calls on the government "to formally recognize the State of Palestine on the 1967 borders, which can be modified by agreement of both sides, when deemed more appropriate." The proposal was adopted by the three majority party: liberals, socialists and greens, and cast two deputies of the extreme left.

Qatar

Qatar and Turkey normalize ties (25 Dec., 2014)

The mystery of the visit of the Emir of Qatar to Turkey has been resolved: the purpose of his visit was to mediate to end the tension in relations between Turkey and Egypt, writes in the first and the inside pages the Posta. Deputy Prime Minister, Bulent Arinc, reportedly said that Turkey's relations with the Gulf countries will soon improve and they want to have good relations with Egypt. The Emir of Qatar, Sheikh al-Thani, conveyed the message that the normalization of relations with Egypt is inevitable and that Turkey must review its policies.

Saudi Arabia

Saudi forces kill 4 gunmen (20 Dec., 2014)

The Saudi security forces killed four militants in a fray today in Aouamiya, announced the Interior Ministry. The soldiers raided a hideout of militants in the city Aouamiya and killed four in exchanges of gunfire. The fighters were behind the assassination of a member of the security forces last Sunday, said the ministry spokesman, which relies on Saudi state news agency SPA. The Aouamiya is the epicenter of the riots in the minority of the Shia Saudi Arabia since early 2011 when there were demonstrations seeking to end discrimination against them and for democratic reforms in the Sunni monarchy.

Somalia

Helicopter shot down in Libya (31 Dec., 2014)

A helicopter was shot down, one of the major oil export terminal stations continues to be on fire, an attack with a car bomb occurred outside the temporary seat of parliament: Libya continues today to be in the grip of violence and conflict for power, that seem to lead to the outbreak of a new, totalitarian civil war. The Libyan air force shot down a helicopter today paramilitary forces, were making airstrike against one of the main oil export terminal stations in the east, where several tanks are still on fire today, officials said.

Syria

ISIS killed 1178 people in Syria (30 Dec., 2014)

The Islamic State killed in the last six months 1,878 people in Syria, most of them civilians, today announced the Syrian Human Rights Observatory. Moreover, during the last two months the IK killed 120 fighters, most of whom were foreigners who were trying to return home. The armed organization has occupied huge parts of Iraq and Syria and in June established a caliphate in the territories under its control. Since then fighting against the Syrian and Iraqi governments, and other armed Kurdish forces.

Sudan

Sudan expels two UN personnel (31 Dec., 2014)

The Sudanese authorities ordered two executives of a service United Nations to leave, according to converging sources, a development which it seems marks the escalation of acts of President Omar Hassan Al-Bashir against the UN activity in his country. These sources reported that officials are the Jordanian Ali al Zadari, Coordinator of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the Dutch Chele Yvonne, the director of the UNDP office in Sudan. The reasons why Khartoum proceeds to expulsion of two executives the UNDP is not clear.

Turkey

Erdogan against Europe over Islamophobia (24 Dec., 2014)

Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan unleashed a fierce verbal attack on the European countries today because criticizing the deterioration the situation regarding freedom of the press and of expression. He called instead to seek a solution to this he called escalation of Islamophobia on the continent.

Yemen

Dozens dead at Ibb city by terrorist attack (31 Dec, 2014)

The toll from the kamikaze attack at Ibb stood at 49 dead and 70 wounded, "said a hospital source telephone AFP. Another medical source confirmed the report, adding that "12 out of 49 the dead can not be recognized. The first assessment which released yesterday spoke 33 dead and dozens injured. The suicide bomber detonated the explosives which were belted into in a cultural center of Ibb where students celebrated the birthday of the Prophet Muhammad. The attack was aimed at the Shiite militia, who had gathered for the religious ceremony.



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