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In special consultative
status with the UN ECOSOC

OSCE
OSCE participating States
International and non-governmental
organizations

**ON THE POSITION OF THE LEADERS OF ORTHODOX AND OTHER
DENOMINATIONS OF THE MIDDLE EAST IN THE CONTEXT OF THE STATES
OF THE OSCE REGION**

Dear participants of the meeting,

Our human rights organization, relying on its special consultative status with the UN Economic and Social Council, draws the attention of the OSCE and participating States to the problem of human rights violations in the Middle East. Migration flows are changing today the cultural and ethnic landscape of the European Union, which do provide refugees with the opportunity to live in a safe environment, however entails problems of cultural integration.

Since this meeting is devoted to the consideration of religious issues and as we are all well aware that migrants arriving now to the European Union are the bearers of certain cultural and religious worldviews, I would like to bring to the attention of the OSCE participating States the position set forth in the joint statement publicized on April 14, 2017, by the leaders of the three largest religious denominations in the Middle East: John X, Greek Orthodox Patriarch of Antioch and all the East, Ignatius Aphrem II, Syrian Orthodox Patriarch of Antioch and all the East, and Joseph Absi, Melkite-Greek Catholic Patriarch of Antioch, Alexandria, and Jerusalem.

This statement is crucial for the OSCE region, since it provides us with a sincere and truthful response of the religious leaders of Christian faith, giving us an insight into the real causes of various problems, which modern Europe is encountering today.

Christian Patriarchs condemn the brutal aggression that occurred on April 14, 2018 against Syria by the United States, France and United Kingdom under the pretext of

accusing the Syrian Government of using chemical weapons. Leaders of Christian denominations consider such accusations unsubstantiated.

Unfortunately, the casualties among the civilian population caused by the bombings on the part of the listed countries along with the Russian Federation, engender insurmountable schisms and divisions in the ethnic and cultural strata of the Muslim and Christian world, as well as lead to the emergence of new risks of terrorism and confrontation. The fight against terrorism cannot be exploited as an excuse for using weapons of mass destruction and indiscriminate bombing, from which civilians suffer.

Let us think about the possible consequences from the perspective of the Christians and Muslims who peacefully coexisted in Syria for many years. I would like to cite the words of Patriarch of Antioch, John X, who said “that Christians and Muslims are two lungs of a single Middle Eastern body that stands on citizenship and common life, we reject anything that would first of all hurt Islam's reputation for tolerance, brotherhood and peaceful life, which we have experienced, and secondly disrupts the right of citizens to have a civic presence free from sectarian or racial pressures.”

This is the mutual position of Christians and Muslims and it must be supported by the authority of the government, preventing incitement of religious hatred and enmity among religious currents and rejecting incorrect interpretations of religious beliefs which stimulate violence. The position of religious leaders on this kind of issues should become pivotal. However, religious leaders alone cannot cope with such problems on their own.

States must persevere in their efforts to construct such a cultural worldview that would be based on religious tolerance and prevent violations of religion-based rights through legislative and law enforcement policies.

It is well known that migration has been considered one of the biggest security threats since the events that took place on September 11, 2001 in New York, when terrorist attacks from the East, or rather the Muslim world (migrants), divided the modern history of international relations into “before” and “after”. This was followed by attacks on Madrid, London and Brussels.

In its turn, the 9/11 phenomenon characterizes the migration policy of the host countries. For instance, over the last several years the UK government has introduced a number of tough anti-terrorism measures, including the detention of suspected terrorists who are non-citizens of the United Kingdom without the sanction of the court. Sometimes such measures are justified, as they protect the law and order, but there is no doubt that unjustified control leads to discontent among the population, especially if it is backed up by hostile propaganda.

It is necessary to fight against false religious concepts that distort Islam and contribute to the creation of radical religion-driven terrorism. But such work should be really effective. If this does not happen, it is necessary to think about creating conditions for the return of migrants to their homeland, since such a decision would be natural and logical.

To this end, the States of the OSCE region and the entire international community should focus on programs for the restoration of the Middle East and provide actual assistance to the countries in need in creating conditions for the return of their indigenous population. Such conditions could already be created in the regions of the Middle East, including in Syria, restoring the destroyed infrastructure of the state.

In this regard, we recommend that the OSCE and participating States:

- **provide real practical support to the religious leaders of the Middle East, in particular to John X, Greek Orthodox Patriarch of Antioch and all the East, Ignatius Aphrem II, Syrian Orthodox Patriarch of Antioch and all the East, who promote the ideas of peaceful coexistence of different religions and can effectively contribute to the improvement of the situation in the region;**
- **develop effective programs and projects for the restoration of the countries of the Middle East and return migrants to their historical homeland.**

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