

## **Resolution on Christian Minority Communities**

*“We, who are many, are one body in Christ,  
and individually we are members one of another.”*  
—Romans 12:5

As members of the global body of Christ we are concerned with the destruction of Christian communities in regions where Christians are targeted as religious minorities. While we are deeply concerned about the persecution of religious minorities regardless of religion or tradition, we feel a distinct call to speak out on behalf of those who are brothers and sisters in the body of Christ. “So then, whenever we have an opportunity, let us work for the good of all, and especially for those of the family of faith” (Galatians 6:10).

In the time following the 2014 Annual Conference “Resolution Responding to the Violence in Nigeria,” we have continued to be grieved by the ongoing destruction experienced by Ekklesiyar Yan’uwa a Nigeria (EYN, the Church of the Brethren in Nigeria). Many members have been killed and displaced, churches have been burned, districts have been shut down, and the overall life of the church has been greatly hindered. Church leaders from EYN have described this violence as genocide and a threat to their existence in northeastern Nigeria.<sup>1</sup>

We also are alarmed by the rapidly diminishing Christian communities in places such as Iraq, Palestine, and Syria. The elimination of these ancient yet still vital Christian communities would not only be a human rights disaster and a loss for the peoples of the region, but also a tragic loss of historic Christian witness in the land where the church first took root.

Rifts between Christian and Muslim communities in all of these contexts have played a key role in this diminishment, and tolerance and understanding between these groups has faltered with deadly consequences. As the World Council of Churches has stated:

Quite rapidly, large areas of the Middle East and North Africa have succumbed to violent sectarian, ethnic, and tribal animosities, and the reform movement has been distracted by political radicalism and religious intolerance. This has led to a widespread humanitarian catastrophe. In this critical situation, the worldwide Christian community is enjoined to manifest its solidarity with all peoples in the Middle East who are struggling for just and peaceful societies, and, at the same time, affirms that the continued presence of Christians in this region is indispensable for plural and diverse communities, and commits itself to accompany all in the building of democratic civil societies.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.brethren.org/news/2014/newsline-special-eyn-is.html>

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.oikoumene.org/en/resources/documents/assembly/2013-busan/adopted-documents-statements/statement-affirming-the-christian-presence-and-witness-in-the-middle-east>

Additionally, in this year commemorating the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Armenian genocide, we reaffirm our commitment to stand with targeted minority groups across the world and call not only for increased awareness of their persecution, but for renewed efforts by the church and the international community to build solidarity and protect minority religious groups who are under threat.

Whereas the New Testament commands all who follow Jesus Christ to acknowledge that we belong to each other as members of his body, the church, and encourages us to treasure the connection we enjoy as disciples of one Lord; and

Whereas we believe that we are truly bound together in one faith and one baptism, even though Christian faith traditions, history, and practices differ in the many manifestations of the Christian church worldwide; and

Whereas we have heard the pleas for help from Christian leaders in lands where the church is pressured politically and socially, suffers persecution, and is enduring violence and death; and

Whereas Christian, Muslim, and other religious communities have often become estranged and antagonistic toward one another, and this estrangement and antagonism has contributed to violent acts and conflicts that have, in different contexts, dangerously marginalized Christians, Muslims, and other religious groups; and

Whereas our 1991 Annual Conference Statement “Peacemaking: The Calling of God’s People in History” calls us to “explore avenues of interfaith dialogue leading toward a visible expression of God’s plan for human unity”<sup>3</sup>; and

Whereas we are called and enabled by the blessing of God to extend the love of Christ to those in need;

Therefore, be it resolved that the Church of the Brethren, its congregations, and members shall take the following steps as each is able:

1. Pray fervently for our sisters and brothers in Christ across the globe who are facing persecution, violence, and even death because of their religious beliefs and activities.
2. Learn about the experience of Christians and churches in places of persecution and conflict around the world, particularly where Christian leaders have warned that the church is in danger of extinction. Northeast Nigeria, Syria, Iraq, Palestine and Israel currently face such a crisis.
3. Extend expressions of Christian love and support to brothers and sisters in the faith in those lands as part of a denomination-wide effort.

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<sup>3</sup> <http://www.brethren.org/ac/statements/1991peacemaking.html>

4. Commit to interfaith dialogues and peace initiatives in our communities and across the globe to promote religious tolerance, understanding, and peacebuilding between religious communities.
5. Support advocacy efforts of the Christian church in places where it is in danger of disappearing. This effort will be facilitated through constituent contacts supported by the Office of Public Witness, with government leaders in the United States, other nations, the United Nations, and other international bodies.
6. Develop relationships with members and leaders of Muslim and other religious communities in the United States so that mutual understanding can be enhanced, grievances and concerns can be shared, and joint advocacy and work can be pursued.
7. Reach out with hospitality and welcome to those in our own communities who have entered the United States in search of refuge from persecution, violence, and threats to their lives and their faith.

***“The Mission and Ministry Board at its meeting on Saturday, March 14, 2015, adopted the Resolution on Christian Minority Communities by unanimous consent, and forwards it to the 2015 Annual Conference for adoption.”***