

Christians and Muslims want to mobilise joint crisis group



Christian-Muslim meeting in Geneva. Photo: Peter Kenny/ENInews.

Peter Kenny

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Geneva (ENInews). Global Christian and Muslim leaders meeting in Switzerland have jointly called for the formation of a group which can be mobilised whenever a crisis threatens to arise in which Christians and Muslims find themselves in conflict.

In a closing statement from their 1-4 November meeting at Geneva's Ecumenical Centre, the leaders of the two faiths said, "Religion is often invoked in conflict creation, even when other factors, such as unfair resource allocation, oppression, occupation and injustice, are the real roots of conflict."

They said, "The basis of our faiths, as expressed in the call to get to know each other and the two commandments to love God and to love the neighbour provide a solid ground for our common responsibility to act and address common concerns."

The meeting at the Geneva centre, which houses the World Council of Churches and other Christian organizations, was convened by the WCC, the Libyan-based World Islamic Call Society, the Jordanian-based Royal Aal al Bayt Institute and the Consortium of "A Common Word", a group that includes Muslim scholars from around the world.

The general secretary of the WCC, the Rev. Olav Fykse Tveit, and Muslim leaders who participated in the meeting, were asked on 4 November if the group had been formed yet and what sort of crisis they would deem necessary to assemble such a group.

Tveit said ideally such a group would be able to prevent a serious crisis occurring, but he also described a statement the Christian-Muslim meeting had issued the day before as an example of how followers of the two faiths can work together.

In that statement, the meeting participants condemned an attack by an armed group on Baghdad's Church of Our Lady of Najat in which 58 people were killed on 31 October.

The leaders urged "the United Nations and its Security Council and all groups that call for just peace, and especially Iraqi officials, to intervene to put an end to all terrorist attacks aimed at degrading Iraqi people, irrespective of their religious affiliation, and defiling Christian and Islamic sacred places".

The Geneva participants expressed "condemnation of all acts of violence that target places of worship and other sacred places, defile them, or threaten the safety and security of worshippers".

Separately, World Student Christian Federation general secretary, Christine Housel, said in a statement from Lebanon, "The Christian community in the Middle East is threatened every day by such incidents."

On the joint Christian-Muslim crisis group, Tveit said it should undertake "preventative action". He pointed to the situation in Sudan, saying that a scheduled referendum on independence for the south of the country, inhabited mainly by Christians and followers of traditional religions, should not become an interreligious conflict with the predominantly Arab and Muslim north.

Muhammad Al-Sammak, of Lebanon's National Council for Christian-Muslim Dialogue, remarked, "We have noticed a big change in the demographics of the world." He said Christians were growing rapidly in numbers in Asia, Africa and South America, in places where Muslims live. "Out of 1.5 billion Muslims in the world, one third now live in non-Muslim countries."

- Geneva meeting site: muslimsandchristians.net