

DISCRIMINATION, PERSECUTION, MARTYRDOM: FOLLOWING CHRIST TOGETHER

Global Consultation | 1 - 5 November 2015 | Tirana, Albania

CONSULTATION MESSAGE

04 November 2015

“If one member suffers, all suffer together; if one member is honoured, all rejoice together.”

(1 Corinthians 12:26)

1. For the first time in the modern history of Christianity high level leaders and representatives of the various Church traditions gathered together to listen to, learn from, and stand with discriminated and persecuted Churches and Christians in the world today.
2. This global gathering of 145 people took place from 2 – 4 November, 2015, in Tirana, Albania, a country that was declared by its constitution to be an atheist state in 1967, and now has flourishing churches in a framework of religious freedom even though some discrimination may remain.
3. The Consultation, entitled *Discrimination, Persecution, Martyrdom: Following Christ Together*, was convened by the Global Christian Forum together with the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity (Roman Catholic Church), the Pentecostal World Fellowship, the World Evangelical Alliance, and the World Council of Churches. It was organized in close collaboration with the Orthodox Autocephalous Church of Albania, the Albanian Bishops' Conference, and the Evangelical Alliance of Albania.
4. We have come together because discrimination, persecution and martyrdom among Christians and people of other faiths in the contemporary world are growing due to a complex variety of factors in different realities and contexts.
5. As we follow Christ, Christians can be exposed to any form of persecution, suffering and martyrdom, because the sinful world is against the Gospel of salvation. But from earliest times Christians experienced the hope and reality of the Resurrection through walking the way of the Cross. Together we follow Christ as we “hunger and thirst for righteousness” (Matthew 5:6) for all.
6. The life of the Church for centuries has been a constant witness in two ways: the proclamation of the Gospel of Christ, and the testimony through the shedding of the martyr's blood. The 21st century is full of moving stories of faithful people who have paid for their dedication to Christ through suffering, torture and execution. Christian martyrs unite us in ways we can hardly imagine.
7. We acknowledge that solidarity among Christian churches is needed to strengthen Christian witness in the face of discrimination, persecution, and martyrdom. In the 21st century, we need to urgently strengthen the solidarity of all Christians, following up on what has been accomplished with insight and discernment from this Consultation.
8. We repent of having at times persecuted each other and other religious communities in history, and ask forgiveness from each other and pray for new ways of following Christ together.

In communion with Christ we commit ourselves:

- (a) *To listen more* to the experiences of Christians, Churches, and of all those who are discriminated against and persecuted, and deepen our engagement with suffering communities.
- (b) *To pray more* for Churches, Christians, and for all those suffering discrimination and persecution, as well as for the transformation of those who discriminate and persecute.
- (c) *To speak up more* with respect and dignity, with a clear and strong voice together, on behalf of those who are suffering.
- (d) *To do more* in mutual understanding to find effective ways of solidarity and support for healing, reconciliation, and for the religious freedom of all oppressed and persecuted people.

9. Listening to the experience of those going through challenging times, praying and discerning together ways of following Christ in these harsh realities, the Consultation calls on:

- (a) *All Christians* to include more prominently in their daily prayers those who are discriminated against, persecuted, and suffering for the fulfilment of God's Kingdom.
- (b) *All Christian organisations on regional, national and local levels* from various traditions to learn, pray and work together in their localities for the persecuted to ensure they are better supported.
- (c) *All Churches* to engage more in dialogue and co-operation with other faith communities, and be "as wise as serpents and innocent as doves" (Matthew 10:16) by remaining vigilant, watchful and fearless in the face of discrimination and persecution.
- (d) *All persecutors* who discriminate against and oppress Christians and violate human rights to cease their abuse, and to affirm the right of all human beings to life and dignity.
- (e) *All governments* to respect and protect the freedom of religion and belief of all people as a fundamental human right. We also appeal to governments and international organisations to respect and protect Christians and all other people of goodwill from threats and violence committed in the name of religion. In addition, we ask them to work for peace and reconciliation, to seek the settlement of on-going conflicts, and to stop the flow of arms, especially to violators of human rights.
- (f) *All media* to report in an appropriate and unbiased way on violations of religious freedom, including the discrimination and persecution of Christians as well as of other faith communities.
- (g) *All educational institutions* to develop opportunities and tools to teach young people in particular about human rights, religious tolerance, healing of memories and hostilities of the past, and peaceful means of conflict resolution and reconciliation.
- (h) *All people of goodwill* to work for justice, peace and development, knowing that poverty and disrespect of human dignity are major contributing factors to violence.

10. We recommend that the Global Christian Forum evaluates within two years the work of this event, and reports to all four bodies for their follow up.

May God the Father who created us equal by His grace, strengthen our efforts to overcome all forms of discrimination and persecution.

May His Holy Spirit guide us in solidarity with all those who seek peace and reconciliation.

May He heal the wounds of the persecuted and grant us hope as we look forward to the glorious coming of our Lord Jesus Christ who will make all things new.