

For Immediate Release
23 April 2013

Syrian Religious Leaders Commit to Establish the Inter-religious Council of Syria—*Religions for Peace*

Istanbul, Turkey | 18-20 April 2013



A wide range of Syrian religious leaders convened in Istanbul to advance multi-religious cooperation for peace in Syria during a meeting, *Syria for all Syrians*. They committed themselves to the establishment of a Syrian *Religions for Peace* Council (*RfP—Syria*).

The Istanbul conference followed a series of earlier consultations of Syrian religious leaders that also called for peace and laid important groundwork for the establishment of *RfP—Syria* (Marrakesh 16-19 November 2011; Oslo 7-9 January 2012; Larnaca 22-23 February 2012; and Cairo 28-29 August 2012).

These meetings were convened by *Religions for Peace (RfP)*, the world's largest multi-religious organization, with the assistance of many partners, including notably the Islamic Society of North America.

In Istanbul, the religious leaders forcefully reiterated their condemnation of the widespread use of violence and the wholesale destruction of Syrian cities and towns. They decried and rejected all attempts to incite sectarian conflict. They stated that cooperation based on shared religious values must be an essential key to unity among all Syrians.

In their call for the formation of a Syrian-led national Inter-religious council, they stressed that it should be a strictly non-political body, inclusive and representative of all religious communities across Syria, and be action-oriented.

They committed to undertake joint projects to provide needed humanitarian assistance, prevent sectarian violence and advance reconciliation. Respectful of their religious differences, they pledged to use their shared moral commitments and respective spiritual teachings as key capacities for action. All Syrian religious communities will be engaged, including their top religious leaders, local mosques and churches and women of faith and religious youth networks. Already initial seed projects are underway, using mosques and churches to provide services to children regardless of their religious or ethnic identity. Additional needed projects were discussed and a process for advancing them agreed upon.

Observers in the meeting included the United Nations Alliance of Civilizations, the Arab League, the Presidency of Religious Affairs of Turkey, the Middle East Council of Churches and the Vatican Pontifical Council for Inter-religious Dialogue.

Dr. Matthew Hodes, Director of the United Nations Alliance of Civilizations, noted: “Syria’s religious communities have unique and irreplaceable roles to play in uniting the Syrian society, an essential condition for progress in building peace.”

Dr. William F. Vendley, *Religions for Peace* International Secretary General, stated: “religious faith can give believers the strength to bear the unbearable, find hope when situations are blocked and—in time—to forgive the unforgiveable.” He added: “We salute the courage and commitment of Syria’s religious communities to work together for just peace. Religious believers around the world will walk with their Syrian religious colleagues in solidarity for peace.”

Contact:

Ms. Valerie Nash, Chief of Staff, Office of the Secretary General
Religions for Peace, 777 United Nations, Plaza, New York, NY 10017, USA
Tel: +1212-687-2163 | Fax: +1 212-983-0098 | www.religionsforpeace.org
E-mail: vnash@religionsforpeace.org

**"Syria for all Syrians"
A meeting convened at the invitation of
(Religions for Peace)
In Istanbul – Turkey, 18-20 April 2013**

Under the banner "Syria for all Syrians: Multi-religious Cooperation for Peace", and building on: the "Marrakech Declaration" (16-19 November 2011), the Larnaca appeal "For Peace in the Syria" (22-23 February 2012), and the Cairo meeting "Rightful Cries to Cease Bloodshed in Syria" (28-29 August 2012), and all other relevant statements and appeals issued by *Religions for Peace*.

A distinguished group of Muslim and Christian clerics, public intellectuals and patriotic Syrians convened in an expanded meeting in Istanbul, Turkey, 18-20 April 2013, upon the invitation of *Religions for Peace* and declared the following:

First: Principles and Visions

- A. That all religions renounce violence, corruption and the destruction of humanity and the environment. All religions advocate peace and love. All Syrians deserve to live a free, dignified and virtuous life.
- B. Preserving the unity of Syria, land and people, is a national duty.
- C. Syria is for all Syrians regardless of their affiliations. Syrians are united in citizenship regardless of their religion, creed, ethnicity, gender and regionalism.
- D. Our commitment to moderation compels us to reject all kinds of violations, particularly those instigated by fanaticism and hatred.
- E. Syria is a country of diversity. Cultural and civilizational diversity is the source of wealth for all.
- F. Emphasize and nurture all commonalities in our religions that call for and nurture peaceful coexistence.
- G. Valuating the role of Syrian women and actively calling to cease all forms of aggression and violence against them.
- H. We condemn the crimes against the Syrian people, support the UN resolutions condemning this violence and reject all efforts to provoke sectarian violence.

Second: The Mechanism

- A. The formation of *Religions for Peace – Syria* affiliated with *Religions for Peace – International*.
- B. Follow up on the implementation of the recommendations and decisions and tasks assigned to the committees of *Religions for Peace – Syria*.
- C. Develop a plan of action that will facilitate interaction with all religious components inside Syria and in other locations of relevance.
- D. Consolidating the link between relief work and spiritual and religious work.
- E. The formation of specialized committees to work on the cessation of violence, especially violence against women and children, and to find ways to combat it.
- F. The formation of youth committees dealing with matters relevant to the youth, and their rehabilitation seeking the advice and support of legal experts and educators.
- G. To set up a local office of *Religions for Peace – Syria* to facilitate the achievement of results on the ground.

All participants pray to God that these efforts will be crowned with success and contribute to achieving freedom, justice and peace for all in the Syrian land of love and peace.