

Statement of the Conference of Latin Bishops of the Arab Regions (CELRA)

RAS AL KHAIMAH (UAE) – from September 30 to October 4, 2014, Bishops from the Arabian Peninsula, Syria, Lebanon, Jordan, Palestine, Israel, Cyprus, Djibouti and Somalia had their annual meeting. Below is the communiqué they released at the end of the meeting.

Our annual meeting was held in Ras Al Khaimah (UAE) from September 30 to October 4, 2014, with the participation of Bishops from the Arabian Peninsula, Syria, Lebanon, Jordan, Palestine, Israel, Cyprus, Djibouti and Somalia. After an enriching exchange on the pastoral situation in our respective countries, we studied and discussed the three themes proposed in our program: Peace and Reconciliation, Migration, and Family.

1. We, the Bishops, share in the sufferings of our people in Gaza, Syria and Iraq who endured massive and extensive destruction, deaths and injuries in large numbers; and of those in Yemen and Somalia, where great political instability continues to prevail. The information about the situation in these areas of conflict is horrible. Nine million Syrians are displaced or homeless. More than half of defenseless Syrian and Iraqi Christians have fled their countries. For the first time in seventeen centuries, a large city like Mosul is without its Christian community. The sufferings of other minorities such as the Yezidis and Kurds, and of many Shiites and Sunnis do not make us apathetic. To put an end to the absurdity of these conflicts, it is necessary to heal and resolve what causes the injustice as in Palestine, both religious and ethnic intolerance as in Syria and Iraq, without excluding the political and economic interests of the countries that support the war and sell weapons.

Therefore, we reiterate that:

- There is no peace without justice and no justice without respect for the human rights, social and religious, and the dignity every person. Finally, there is no peace without forgiveness and reconciliation. The Church prays and works that reconciliation may become a reality in the Middle East. Without true reconciliation based on justice and mutual forgiveness, there will be no peace, because the same factors that bring about the conflict will continue to generate more hatred and more wars.

- Violence in the name of religion cannot be used against anyone because every human person has a right to be respected regardless of religious affiliation, ethnic or minority status. At this point, we wish to acknowledge the role of Churches and its agencies in the distribution of humanitarian aid no matter what religion the people belong to, as well as the heroism of many Muslims in condemning religious radicalism and defending persecuted minorities at the risk of their own life.

- The right of the oppressed to self-defense must be protected, and to support the international community in the use of proportionate force to stop aggression and injustice against ethnic and religious minorities.

2. We acknowledge the millions of foreign workers seeking employment and opportunities for a life with dignity, who are welcomed in many countries in the Middle East. We thank the governments who are making positive steps forward in the recognition of the freedom of worship for migrant workers. These migrants, with their skills and enthusiasm care for the well-being of the inhabitants of countries and cooperate in building mutually beneficial relations in exchange for a just compensation. At the same time, the Bishops ask them to respect the culture and traditions of the countries that receive them.

We met many communities in Dubai, Abu Dhabi, Fujairah, Umm Al Quwain, Sharjah and Ras Al Khaimah, belonging to 34 nationalities. We admired their faith, as they live in the midst of difficulties and sacrifices, but with great joy. The majority of the workers give a testimony of peace and tolerance and expect reciprocity and respect for their human dignity and their social rights, more particularly the women.

3. In view of the forthcoming Synod on the Family during this month of October in Rome, we exchanged ideas on the beauty, centrality and importance of the Christian family, willed by God on the model of the covenant between Christ and His Church. We discussed the various challenges of the family in general, but especially the experience of refugees and migrants. We thought of the spouses who are separated or are in crisis and we posed the question of how to find the balance between the indissolubility of marriage on the one hand and the needs of divorced and remarried to a sacramental life. We also emphasized the need for on-going formation of basic families, especially in accompanying young couples and their inclusion in ecclesial movements that minister to families.

We look forward to many fruits from the upcoming Synod and we invite our faithful to pray for Pope Francis and the Synod Fathers, that the Lord may enlighten them to give responses appropriate to the challenges and risks that confront the institution of the family.

The Bishops of CELRA

Ras Al Khaimah

October 4, 2014, the Feast of St. Francis of Assisi

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