

Network for Inter faith Concerns

Christian-Muslim News Digest Issue 4 2007

A Common Word

On October 13, 2007 the Royal Aal al-Bayt Institute for Islamic Thought published [A Common Word Between Us and You](#), signed by 138 Muslims, in an effort to publicly recognize common ground between Christians and Muslims. The signatories include representation from all branches of Islam who have collectively agreed on the “foundational principles of both faiths: love of the One God, and love of the neighbour.” As explained in the opening paragraph, the importance of finding common ground and understanding play a significant role in the future of world peace. The letter has been well-received by many Christian leaders and many of their reflections can be reviewed [here](#).

In a [press release from Lambeth Palace](#), Archbishop of Canterbury, Dr. Rowan Williams explained in his response: “The theological basis of the letter and its call to ‘vie with each other only in righteousness and good works; to respect each other, be fair, just and kind to another and live in sincere peace, harmony and mutual goodwill,’ are indicative of the kind of relationship for which we yearn in all parts of the world, and especially where Christians and Muslims live together. It is particularly important in underlining the need for respect towards minorities in contexts where either Islam or Christianity is the majority presence.”

While the letter intends to set a [positive precedent](#) for Christian-Muslim relations, it does not come without criticism. Some Muslims are concerned the letter’s signatories, most of whom are academics, did not include more significant and well-known religious leaders. Similarly, there are concerns that the letter’s signatories do not represent a wider geographic spectrum of the global Muslim community. Others feel that while the letter’s words point towards more positive dialogue, it does not go far enough in suggesting specific ways to act in response to the letter. Despite criticisms, however, the letter has been welcomed as a positive contribution to Christian-Muslim relations and a launch pad for further discussion. More information and responses to the letter from Christians, including various bishops and other key leaders, can be found [here](#) and [here](#).

Christian-Muslim Greeting

Iraqi Christians in Kirkuk, [extended a Ramadan greeting](#) to Muslims in Iraq. The Christian community, lead by Chaldean Archbishop of Kirkuk, Msgr. Louis Sako, committed to praying for their “Muslim Brothers” during Ramadan. According to AsiaNews, Sako encouraged the Christian community “to respect the feelings of Muslim citizens not to eat and to drink publicly during this month and not to wear indecent dress, and to join them in praying for the unity, stability, and the [sic] safeguard the lives and dignity of Iraqis.”

In what some see as a response to the Ramadan greeting and A Common Word letter, Muslims extended a [greeting to Christians during Christmas](#). “During these joyful holidays we write to you, our Christian neighbors all over the world, to express our thanks for the beautiful and gracious responses that we Muslims have been receiving from the very first day we issued our invitation to come together to ‘A Common Word’ based on ‘Love of God and Love of Neighbor’. . .” The greeting promoted forgiveness and the dignity of human life.

In Jordan

In October 2007, the [7th annual Christian-Muslim Youth Seminar](#) was held in Jordan. Forty-five Christians and Muslims from Palestine, Syria, Egypt, and Jordan met under the theme of *Christian & Muslim Youth Between Religious Commitment and Changing Culture*. The conference, hosted by the Middle East Council of Churches (MECC), challenged the participants to gain better understanding, respect, and tolerance for each other. In addition to this, MECC hopes that the conference will encourage a well established network of communication among the youth that attended.

In Nigeria

Tensions between Christians and Muslims have increased in the northern Nigerian city of Bauchi where unidentified persons removed foundation blocks from a high school mosque. The mosque is located in an area of the city where the population of Christians and Muslims is mixed. Consequently, destruction of the mosque incited tension between the two communities. Violence erupted and there were reports of Christian shops, churches, and homes being attacked. Reportedly, ten people were killed as a result. Many people in the area have left their

homes in an effort to protect their families and avoid getting caught up in the violence. Relief organizations have been in Bauchi providing mattresses and medical supplies while troops have been deployed there to enforce a curfew and maintain peace. For more information see [New Christian-Muslim Violence in Northern Nigeria](#) and this [article](#).

In Lebanon

On November 23, 2007, the term of President Emil Lahoud expired while a successor had yet to be determined. According to Lebanon's constitution, the president must be a Maronite Christian, the Prime Minister a Sunni Muslim, and the Speaker of Parliament a Shiite Muslim. This was mandated by the French in the early 20th century in an effort to provide equal representation among the major faiths in Lebanon. While the relationship between Muslims and Christians has been affected by the delay in electing a president, much of the conflict emanates from within the Christian community. This is because the Christians have been unable to agree on a presidential candidate. As a result, the Muslim community continues to pressure Christian to make a decision. If they are unable to do so, Muslims are willing to elect a president from their own community. If this occurs, it could lead to the loss of security of the Christian Maronites in the government as they will no longer have the representation that has normally been allotted to them. Many Christians have already left Lebanon because of the strife the conflict has caused within the country. The population of Christians in Lebanon is already less than 30-40% and many are concerned that more emigration will only further decrease this minority. For more information see [Lebanon's Exodus](#) and [here](#).

In Kenya

A two day conference on Christian-Muslim relations in East Africa was held in October in an effort to encourage more intentional relationships and understanding among the two religions. The conference included participants from East Africa, Ethiopia, Egypt, Nigeria, Togo, Germany, Holland, and the UK. By fostering mutual respect and understanding among religions, many believe it is possible to live peacefully together. Some even suggested that children's textbooks include lessons on how people from different religions can successfully live together. Other issues raised at the conference included asking leaders not to insult followers of other faiths which often leads to misunderstanding.

In other news, tension surrounding the recent presidential election in Kenya has destabilized the country. In August presidential candidate Raila Odinga, a member Luos ethnic group, signed a clandestine "memorandum of understanding" with Muslim leaders to accept Muslims "[as his partner of choice](#)" if he won the presidential election. Although Odinga is [reportedly a Christian](#), many Christians reacted to the agreement with anger and in fear of the possibility of Shar'ia Law. Consequently, many believed that before the election this religious issue might have some bearing on the way people voted. Former president Mwai Kibaki, a member of the Kikuyu ethnic group, won the election. However, many are upset over how Kibaki secured most of the votes, safeguarding his presidency and allowing him to continue to stay in office. Although the race for the presidential election began with traces of religious obstacles, the resulting tension and violence has become driven more by ethnic and political motivations dividing the Kikuyu and Luos. Riots have recently broken out with a death toll possibly reaching over [250 people](#).

For more information see [Churches and Muslim Leaders Urge Rejection of Contentious Memorandum of Understanding](#)