



## Middle Eastern Violence and the Place of Christians in the Region Addressed in Patriarchal Statements

The first statement, dated July 23, 2014, reads ([official Arabic version](#); [official English version](#)):

At a time when Syria's wounds have been bleeding for more than three years, amidst the wounds of Iraq, which has experienced conflict since the 1980's, amidst the unrest that is sweeping countries near and far, and amidst the world's indifference to Palestine's wounds, which have not healed in almost seventy years, these days in particular we are witnessing a multiplication of these wounds in the expulsion of Mosul's Christians and the all-out assault on Gaza amidst a disgraceful international silence.

The cycle of violence sweeping Iraq and Syria, expelling peaceful citizens has not let up, as recent events in Iraq and specifically in Mosul have completed the series of murder, religious prejudice, and terror.

We strongly condemn attacks on any segment of society in this Middle East and we especially condemn the attack on the Christians of Mosul and their being compelled by force of arms to change their religion under the penalty of paying the Jizya or abandoning their homes and having their property confiscated. These fundamentalist movements that are trying to become mini-states through force and terror with outside moral and material support are the greatest threat to people in the Middle East and to coexistence there. We ask the international community and specifically the United Nations and all global powers and organizations to take into proper consideration what is happening in Iraq, Mosul and the entire Middle East.

We call on them to deal with the current situation courageously, with a genuine language of human rights and not a language of interests that uses the principles of human rights and exploits them in the service of narrow aims and interests. We ask the countries that provide outside support to these groups, whether directly or indirectly, to cease immediately from all forms of material, moral, logistical and military support for these extremist groups and so cut off at its root the terrorism that is first of all a threat to the peace and peoples of those countries. We likewise call for an end to resorting to any form of violence as a means by which citizens deal with each other.

Because we in the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate of Antioch and All the East constantly affirm that Christians and Muslims are two lungs of a single Middle Eastern body that stands on citizenship and common life, we reject anything that would first of all hurt Islam's reputation for tolerance, brotherhood and peaceful life, which we have experienced, and secondly disrupts the right of citizens to have a civic presence free from sectarian or racial pressures.

As the world watches what is happening in Mosul, the chain of violence is repeated in the Gaza Strip under various justifications, amidst a frightening international silence. This is happening while the outside world is content to watch a bloodbath that has not spared women, children and the elderly. It is as though the Middle East has become a testing-ground for every sort of weapon and a fertile soil for every sort of plot. It is as though the people of the Middle East are a commodity created to be dough in the hands of the forces of evil, when they are created to be the image of the Lord's splendor and the focus of the Creator's good pleasure, with good relationships with their fellow citizens and fellow humans.



We in the Greek Orthodox Patriarch of Antioch and All the East understand the common fate that binds us to our Christian and Muslim brothers in Palestine. We implore the international community for a ceasefire in Gaza and an end to the sinful siege on our brothers in Palestine, whose cause remains par excellence the cause of Humanity.

The attachment of the Palestinians to their land and their longing to return to it is a cause for hope for all those suffering in this Middle East and a mark of shame upon the faces of those for whom “human rights” end at the hills of Palestine while at the same time that they traffic in these “rights” in order to intervene in the affairs of other peoples.

We pray that God give peace to the world, that He give strength to all those in distress, that He cause peace to be lasting in the Middle East, so that humanity may enjoy well-being and tranquility.



Iraqi Christians who fled the violence in the northern city of Mosul pray at a church in the village of Qaraqosh on July 19. Photo: NBC News

**The second statement, dated July 30, 2014, reads ([official Arabic version](#); [official English version](#)):**

In the midst of all destruction which is taking place in the Middle East and with the recent events like



killings and displacements which affected Christians and others, and in the midst of the conflicts in Syria and the attack on Gaza, we hear some officials of Western governments giving declarations from time to time or publishing some “studies” to express their unreal empathy with Christians of certain areas and showing their solidarity with them, describing their circumstances in a way that supports the logic of minorities. But the most recent of these declarations is that of the French government regarding its readiness to accept the Iraqi Christians and granting them a political asylum, in addition to the study issued by the American Ministry of Foreign Affairs that describes the presence of the Christians in the Middle East as “*a shadow of its former status*”.

We, in the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate of Antioch and all the East, would like to confirm that the difficult circumstances in the East do not justify anybody’s attempt to misuse them as “Trojan Horse” to empty the East from its Christians, declaring that what Christians are confronting in the East is similar to what is happening to religious or ethnic minorities in other places of the world. We believe that helping the inhabitants of the East, Christians or Muslims, starts with uprooting terrorism from its homeland and stop nourishing the movements of extremism and *Takfirism* (religious prejudice), whose financial resources are very well known as well as the states and the governments that offer them the ideological, logistic and military support through undeclared international alliances. The best way to help Christians and Muslims in the East is by restoring peace through dialogue and political solution, and through practical rejection of all resources that nourish the reasons of this extremism, refusing the injustice towards Palestinians, adapting an honest Media that shows the active role of the Christians in the life of their homelands away from any statistical division of people.

We say it to all: the only embracing place for Christians and Muslims of this area is their homelands, in which they have been living together for many centuries, building a unique civilization recognized by a real partnership; a civilization that transferred to the West the human heritage and enriching it. We, the Christians of this land, will not accept to be treated through the logic of minorities which is imposed on us from abroad, and we reconfirm that we were and are still committed to the message of our Gospel, which has arrived to us from our ancestors 2000 years ago. Our forefathers carried and transferred this message to us enduring numerous afflictions. And we will keep this seed which we have received here in the East, growing it and being loyal to it.