

## **On the calls for freedom in the Middle East and North Africa**

**A statement issued by the Religious Liberty Partnership – May 2011**

As members of the Religious Liberty Partnership (RLP), we have closely observed the protests held in many Middle Eastern and North African countries over the past few months. We welcome the widespread calls for greater freedom and strongly endorse these aspirations. We believe that freedom, equality and justice for all are essential for the development and cohesion of societies. We also welcome the response of some governments in lifting emergency laws and enacting constitutional change. However, we note with concern the violence against peaceful protesters at different times and places.

### **1. The RLP acknowledges that:**

- 1.1. There have been high levels of commitment and sacrifice by many in pursuing their desire for greater freedom and improved economic opportunities.
- 1.2. There has been cooperation across religious communities to work for justice and equality for all.
- 1.3. There can be no true freedom without freedom of thought, conscience and religion. The essence of humanity requires the ability to investigate the origin and meaning of human existence, and to adopt a belief of one's choosing.
- 1.4. The 2004 Arab Charter on Human Rights reaffirms the principles of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) and the provisions of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), both of which uphold the fundamental nature of freedom of religion.
- 1.5. Constitutions and legal systems in many Middle Eastern and North African countries recognise some Christian and other indigenous minority religious communities. However, these communities often continue to face marginalisation, discrimination or persecution.

### **2. The RLP calls on governments in Middle Eastern and North African countries to:**

- 2.1. Ensure that the principles of freedom, equality and justice for all underpin the changes to constitutions, legal frameworks and social structures being made in response to the protests.

- 2.2. Ensure that all citizens are granted the full enjoyment of all human rights, including the foundational human right to adopt a religion or belief of their choice. This includes the right to believe or not to believe, and the right to change one's religion.
- 2.3. Ensure that all citizens have the freedom, either individually or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest their religion or belief in worship, observance, practice and teaching, as enunciated in the UN Declaration on the Elimination of All Forms of Intolerance and of Discrimination Based on Religion or Belief.
- 2.4. Ensure equality under the law for all religious groups with respect to recognition, registration and regulation, including the establishment and maintenance of places of worship.
- 2.5. Recognise the right to teach, manifest, and disseminate one's religion or belief. This right must be exercised in a manner that respects the rights of others, refrains from all forms of coercion, inducements or other undue pressure.
- 2.6. Ensure that all citizens have the right to take their religious faith into the public sphere to inform public policy debate, recognising that it is a common feature of many faiths that ethical aspects of the faith should impact all aspects of life.
- 2.7. Respond promptly to any incident of violence against a religious community or members thereof, ensuring prompt and effective investigation that brings perpetrators to justice, provides protection, and allows victims to obtain due redress.
- 2.8. Ensure that all citizens are treated equally in every area of public life, including access to economic opportunity, and that education systems actively promote understanding, tolerance and respect for all.

### **3. The RLP calls on the international community to:**

- 3.1. Ensure that religious freedom is emphasised in engagement with Middle Eastern and North African governments, including its fundamental importance for long-term stability and as a bulwark against religious extremism.
- 3.2. Ensure that the provision of all humanitarian and security assistance, and support for civil society is undertaken in a manner that supports and endorses religious freedom, and affirms the equality of all citizens.

### **4. The RLP calls on the church in the Middle East and North Africa to:**

- 4.1. Pray for their countries, national leaders and fellow citizens.

- 4.2. Stand united to constructively engage in public life, and to work for equality and the promotion of religious freedom for all.

## **5. The RLP calls on the worldwide church to:**

- 5.1. Remember that “injustice somewhere is injustice everywhere” (Martin Luther King Jr.)
- 5.2. Uphold in prayer the church throughout the Middle East and North Africa.
- 5.3. Support by all other appropriate means the church as it endeavours to secure equality and full civil rights for Christians and other religious communities in the Middle East and North Africa.
- 5.4. Recognise that the church in many Middle Eastern and North African countries has little recent experience of engagement in public life, and therefore to provide encouragement and training in this area.

## **6. The RLP commits to:**

- 6.1. Facilitate informed prayer for the region, its leaders and people, its church and the introduction of freedom, equality and justice for all.
- 6.2. Continue raising awareness of the plight of minority religious communities throughout the Middle East and North Africa.
- 6.3. Empower and stand alongside those working for greater freedom, equality and justice for Christians and other religious communities in the Middle East and North Africa.

[Editorial note: The list of signatory members of the Religious Liberty Partnership can be viewed at <http://tinyurl.com/MENA2011>]

The Religious Liberty Partnership (RLP) is a collaborative effort of Christian organizations from around the world focused on religious liberty. The RLP seeks to more intentionally work together in addressing advocacy, assistance, and in raising the awareness of religious persecution globally. Members of the RLP are substantially involved (time, personnel, and resources) with ministry to persecuted Christians and/or on religious liberty issues in whatever context and strategy. For more information on the Middle East and North Africa Statement or on the Religious Liberty Partnership, see <http://www.rlppartnership.org> or contact Brian O’Connell, RLP Facilitator at: [Brian@RLPartnership.org](mailto:Brian@RLPartnership.org); +1 425-218-4718, [www.RLPartnership.org](http://www.RLPartnership.org).