



## World Student Christian Federation YOUTH CONFERENCE

### “Peace-Building in the Middle East and Overcoming Violence”

Cairo, Egypt, 30 July to 4 August 2017

### COMMUNIQUÉ



We, the 45 youth and students representing Student Christian Movements (SCMs) from Indonesia, New Zealand, France, USA, Canada, Kenya, Egypt, Uruguay, Jordan, Lebanon, Palestine, Iraq, Madagascar, Switzerland, Cuba and Colombia;

Gathering for the Youth Conference on Peace-building in the Middle East and Overcoming Violence from 30<sup>th</sup> of July to 4<sup>th</sup> of August, 2017 at the St. Mark Coptic Center, Cairo, Egypt;

Coming from diverse identities and cultures, are committed to being in a common dialogue for peace and overcoming violence.

The six-day Youth Conference created an open space for us to discuss and learn about the situation in the Middle East and in other countries. Through the various inputs, sharing and dialogue, we have come to the following understanding;

- The Middle East is currently undergoing an Ottoman era state of violence and conflict in which nations are split according to sectarian and ethnic criteria, further intensifying the existing gaps between religions, sects, and ethnicities.
- The churches in the Middle East, holding the dominant thinking that stability ensures their survival as ‘minorities’, have accommodated with the current established order. This attitude has led churches to a political self-marginalization and to a moral and ethical resignation.
- Violent extremism cannot be confronted without cooperation among the religious communities. A culture of counter violence can only be created in an interfaith platform.
- Youth and children today are raised in violent environments, biased tendencies and religious fundamentalism, which have put at stake justice, political participation, human rights and national dignity.
- Stereotypes and misunderstanding about the social, political and religious contexts in the Middle East are prevalent and need to be addressed.
- We live in countries where economic, political and religious powers have been using a misinterpretation of the Bible to oppress women, children, immigrants, etc., and to justify wars and occupation.
- The Arab world is characterized by dictatorships, corruption, oppression, absence of the rule of law, deficient constitutional and legislative systems, underdevelopment, social and economic injustices, low status for women and youth in society, absence of critical thinking, and rise of religious radicalism.
- Multi-faith youth coalitions for peace-building are rarely seen or known by the United Nations offices in different Arab and Middle Eastern countries. One-faith (only) youth networks are important and valuable, but multi-faith ones are stronger for multi-lateral entities like the UN, and even by some western donor governments.

### **Our message to the Christian youth:**

After listening to our guest speakers and working together in groups, we have come up with various courses of action that we as young people can do. Our appeal to our fellow Christian youth is to accept others who do not share our beliefs. The acceptance of others will help create a world of peace where all people can live together. By accepting each other, we can start to create an equal society that values each individual no matter what ethnicity, gender or religion they belong to. This equality will bring justice for those that have been oppressed, attacked and/or displaced from their homes. It is our responsibility, as young people, to take a stand and help bring about peace into our world. So, we ask that we make this a priority in our lives through every action we do.

### **Our message to the churches:**

As young people, we ask the churches not to spread hatred speech or judgment but to preach love, peace and acceptance for all people as God’s creation. We ask our churches to take part in interfaith dialogue, to start building relationships with members of other faiths, so that we may come to understand their beliefs and accept them as brothers and sisters. We ask our churches to acknowledge that we cannot master the truth; we can only approach the truth.

Only God holds the truth. As the present youth, we are the church of the future. Because of this, it is important for the churches to communicate with us and to ensure that our opinions are heard. It is part of the role of churches to promote human dignity and to serve the common good.

### **Our Call to Action:**

As participants of the Conference, we are committed;

#### **1. To strengthen the already existing interfaith cooperation that promotes peace-building through dialogue, common social action and sacred scripture analysis.**

Our aim is to engage at least 50% of the SCMs of the Middle East in events concerning dialogue, common social action, and sacred scripture analysis. We will do this through the following activities;

- Arts, sports and music to create a space for dialogue
- Contact with Middle East interfaith network groups
- Connect with KAICIID to see how WSCF could work with scouts in the Middle East
- Religious literacy workshops and interreligious dialogue facilitation workshops
- Promote and discuss Kairos Palestine I and II documents
- Promote WSCF policy papers on Palestine
- Promote/encourage boycott of Israeli products

#### **2. To engage members of SCMs in promoting WSCF curricula on peace-building for youth and students and to cultivate in children a living out of the Gospel in a non-oppressive way.**

We aim to involve 50% of the SCMs in the ME who work with youth in their community to establish a safe environment and to adopt WSCF curricula on peace building in addition to regular curricular activities.

- Development of curriculum and e-learning platforms
- Training of the regional trainers.
- WSCF toolkit for children on conflict resolution, interreligious literacy, eco-justice and peace-building through lessons, songs, drawing books, etc.
- WSCF e-magazine and social media to include the work of children

#### **3. To restore and promote an authentic narrative and image of the Middle East.**

We will include all the WSCF regions involved in advocacy and solidarity work on the ME through a social media campaign.

- A social media campaign that includes:
  - Testimonies of students and young people from each country in the ME.
  - Short videos, documentaries, theatre performances with striking messages
- To take part in a week (21-27 September) in the year dedicated to advocacy and solidarity for the youth in the ME “the world student week of prayer for the ME.” (UN) Peace-related

- Create a WhatsApp Group to promote dialogue online

#### **4. To achieving a liberated approach to the Bible by developing critical thinking among the youth.**

We aim to involve at least 50% of the national movements of the ME in incorporating a contextualized and liberated analysis and reflections on the Bible on key issues to the youth.

- Propose a regional/global WSCF common scripture reading of Biblical passages that have been used to oppress others, and to use this as basis for reflection and dialogue among theologians and students from different SCMs.
- Exchange above reflections among the SCMs across the regions.
- Participate in experiential Popular Education Methodology Workshops to acquire the skills, theoretical methodologies and experience necessary to lead this kind of study.
- To incorporate the reading of passages through lens of gender justice.

#### **5. Build and strengthen international solidarity to promote peace-building and the voices of young people in international platforms, such as the UN, inter-religious networks and church bodies.**

- Exchange program for young people between churches
- Strengthen connection among the regions on peace-building issues such as migrants and refugees
- International solidarity exchange programs
- Form an international interreligious working group among students and youth to enhance cooperation
- Research and engage in the UN Alliance of Civilizations (UNAOC) initiative seeking to engage youth in intercultural and interreligious efforts around peace-building.
- Investigate and connect with the efforts led by the UN Peacebuilding Fund that involve the youth and pertain to issues related to youth and peace and security.
- Read up and become conversant on the UN Security Council Resolution on Youth, Peace and Security, and relate it to our own work as faith-based and/or faith-inspired entities.
- Promote the efforts and potential of faith-based youth organizations and networks to the various UN offices (UNDP, UNFPA, UNICEF, UN Women).

#### **Request for prayers:**

We ask for prayers for justice and peace in all countries that are facing oppression, violence and political struggles. We pray for a culture of forgiveness and acceptance of all people. We pray for the civilization of charity. Finally, we pray for all those people who are personally affected by hatred, violence and oppression.

*Ut Omnes Unum Sint* - **“That They All May Be One”**.

Cairo, Egypt  
4<sup>th</sup> August 2017