

Press release from Lambeth Palace

For immediate use

Wednesday 15th October 2008

Communiqué from *A Common Word* conference

At a press conference today, The Archbishop of Canterbury, Dr Rowan Williams, and His Excellency Dr Ali Gomaa, presented the communiqué from 'A Common Word' conference, a meeting of leading Muslim and Christian clerics and scholars.

The full text is below:

We, the Christian and Muslim leaders and scholars gathered for the Conference on A Common Word and Future Muslim-Christian Engagement from 12 to 15 October 2008AD/1429AH, give thanks to Almighty God for the opportunity to meet together and grow in mutual understanding, trust and friendship.

We wish to express our particular gratitude to the His Grace the Archbishop of Canterbury, Dr Rowan Williams, for convening the conference in partnership with the Cambridge Inter-Faith Programme and the Royal Aal Al-Bayt Foundation, and for hosting us at Lambeth Palace. We are grateful too for the extraordinarily generous hospitality offered by the Colleges and University of Cambridge. We are especially appreciative of Emmanuel College's hosting our opening lectures and dinner, Jesus College for offering facilities for our plenary and group discussions and providing meals, Clare College for dinner and fine music, as well as the great number of students and staff of the Colleges who never tired of offering cheerful assistance.

We are conscious that our meeting represented the most significant gathering of international Muslim leaders ever to take place in the United Kingdom, matched by a similarly wide diversity of traditions and geographical backgrounds amongst the Christian participants. We were greatly stimulated by the opening addresses to the conference by the Archbishop and His Excellency Dr Ali Gomaa, the Grand Mufti of Egypt, and the responses to their addresses by His Eminence Dr Mustafa Cerić, the Grand Mufti of Bosnia Herzegovina and His Beatitude Gregorios III, Melkite Greek-Catholic Patriarch of Antioch & All the East, of Alexandria and of Jerusalem.

We live in an increasingly global world that brings with it increased interdependence. The closer we are drawn together by this globalisation and interdependence, the more urgent is the need to understand and respect one another in order to find a way out of our troubles. Meeting at a time of great turbulence in the world financial system our hearts go out to the many people throughout the world whose lives and livelihood are affected by the current crisis. When a crisis of this magnitude occurs, we are all tempted to think solely of ourselves and our families and ignore the treatment of minorities and the less fortunate. In this conference we are celebrating the shared values of love of God and love of neighbour, the basis of A Common Word, whilst reflecting self-critically on how often we fall short of these standards. We believe that the divine commandment to love our neighbour should prompt all people to act with compassion towards others, to fulfil their duty of helping to alleviate misery and hardship. It is out of an understanding of shared values that we urge world leaders and our faithful everywhere to act together to ensure that the burden of this financial crisis, and also the global environmental crisis, does not fall unevenly on the weak and the poor. We must seize the opportunity for implementing a more equitable global economic system that also respects our role as stewards of the earth's resources.

Our gathering was timed to coincide with the first anniversary of A Common Word Between Us and You. We unanimously welcomed this letter from Muslim leaders and scholars and the Archbishop's letter A Common Word for the Common Good, noting both their historic, ground-breaking nature and the collegial processes from which they issued. The generous spirit that characterises both letters allowed us, carefully and honestly, to begin exploring areas of potential agreement as well as some of the difficult issues which have sometimes become the

focus for misunderstanding and hostility. We discussed our understanding of scripture, shared moral values, respect for foundational figures, religious freedom and religiously motivated violence.

As we were meeting together, we were deeply troubled to learn of the situation in Mosul (Iraq) where threats to the Christian community have further added to the tragic Iraqi refugee situation. These threats undermine the centuries-old tradition of local Muslims protecting and nourishing the Christian community, and must stop. We are profoundly conscious of the terrible suffering endured by Iraqi people of every creed in recent years and wish to express our solidarity with them. We find no justification in Islam or Christianity for those promoting the insecurity or perpetrating the violence evident in parts of Iraq. We call upon the religious, political and community leaders to do all in their power to promote the return of all persons and communities, including the ancient Christian communities, and ensure a stable environment in which all citizens can flourish. We unequivocally declare that, in Iraq as anywhere else in the world, no person or community should be persecuted or threatened on account of their religious faith. We must all have a particular concern for religious minorities in our midst. We pray that Iraq may find peace and that our two religions may work together to overcome divisions in society, demonstrating faithfulness to the dual commandment to love God and love neighbour.

One of the most moving elements of our encounter has been the opportunity to study together passages from our scriptures. We have felt ourselves to have been together before God and this has given us each a greater appreciation for the richness of the other's heritage as well as an awareness of the potential value in being joined by Jewish believers in a journey of mutual discovery and attentiveness to the texts we hold sacred. We wish to repeat the experience of a shared study of scriptural texts as one of the ways in which we can come, concretely, to develop our understanding of how the other understands and lives their own faith. We commend this experience to others.

Looking towards the future, mindful of the crucial importance of education and inspired by our presence in a great seat of learning, we have also been keen to identify specific ways in which our encounter might be broadened and deepened. We have, therefore, committed ourselves to the following over the coming year:

- To identify and promote the use of educational materials, for all age-groups and in the widest possible range of languages, that we accept as providing a fair reflection of our faiths
- To build a network of academic institutions, linking scholars, students and academic resources, with various committees and teams which can work on shared values
- To identify funds to facilitate exchanges between those training for roles of leadership within our religious communities
- To translate significant texts from our two traditions for the use of the other.

As we prepare to return, each to our own countries and contexts, we resolve to act on the oft-repeated desire to find the means of ensuring that the two letters we have discussed and the wonderful fruits of our time together are spread amongst our co-religionists; that the spirit of collaboration, mutual respect and desire for greater understanding may be the mark of our relationship for the benefit of all humankind.

To God be the glory for that which has been achieved in these days together, and may God guide us in the right path as we carry forward the work begun.

ENDS

Notes to editors:

Participants List - Muslims

H.E. Shaykh Prof. Dr Ali Gomaa Mohamed Abdel Wahab

Grand Mufti, Republic of Egypt

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Dean, Department of Religion, University of Damascus

H.E. Prof. Dr Allamah Shaykh Abdallahi Ould Cheikh El Mahfoudh Ould Boye
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Founder and President, Global Center for Renewal and Guidance

Shaykh Al-Habib Omar bin Mohammed bin Salem Ban Hafedh
Dean, Dar Al-Mustafa, Tarim

H.E. Shaykh Prof. Dr Mustafa Cerić
Grand Mufti
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Prof. Dr H.R.H. Prince Ghazi bin Muhammad bin Talal
Personal Envoy and Special Advisor of H.M. King Abdullah II
Chairman of the Board, Royal Aal al-Bayt Institute for Islamic Thought

Prof. Dr Ingrid Mattson
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Participants List - Christians

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Melkite Greek Catholic Patriarch of Antioch & All the East, of Alexandria and of Jerusalem

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The Rt Revd David Hamid
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The Rt Revd Dr Josiah Idowu-Fearon
Bishop of Kaduna, Nigeria
Co-President of the Anglican Communion's Network for Inter Faith Concerns

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Professor Emeritus, Formerly Pro-Vice-Chancellor, University of Birmingham

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Revd Dr Mindawati Perangin-angin
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