

A TIME TO GATHER



The African Interfaith Conference

8th-13th of October 2008 Cairo, Egypt



A time to gather, not to scatter

The African Interfaith Conference,
Cairo, Egypt
the 8th-13th of October 2008

The Episcopal/Anglican Diocese of Egypt with North Africa and the Horn of Africa with Programme for Christian-Muslim Relations in Africa (PROCMURA)

Introduction - Bishop Mouneer Hanna Anis

It is beyond a shadow of doubt that within the last twenty years, extremism, fanaticism and polarization have been on the rise, even while Interfaith Dialogue is taking place and is also on the rise; at the same time, when people who are involved at Interfaith Dialogue for accepting the other, listening to the other, and tolerance we see that insulting the other and depriving the other of human rights is also on the increase. This paradox leads us to the following questions:

- Is there any value in Interfaith Dialogue?
- Should we come up with a more active agenda for Interfaith Dialogue?
- How can we encourage the importance of Interfaith Dialogue to the people at the street level?
- How can we actively move in daily dialogue?
- How does Interfaith Dialogue become more influential on our people?

All these questions go around in our minds today. This is why we have come here:

- to find answers to these questions,
- to evaluate ourselves with transparency, and
- to find together a way in which we can walk in the coming years.

Thank you,

+Mouneer

The Diocese of Egypt together with PROCMURA convened the African Interfaith Conference from 8th-13th October 2008. Danmission also partnered in this conference. The objective of the conference was to affirm and promote the global values of Dialogue, especially in Africa which is in need of stability, security, and development. Representatives from Sub-Saharan African countries (Ghana, Kenya, mainland Tanzania, Zanzibar, and Togo), North African countries (Algeria, Egypt, Libya, Tunisia) as well as Western countries (England, Denmark, Italy, and the United States) participated in the conference.

By virtue of meeting in Egypt, the representatives were immediately made aware of the fact that Christians and Muslims have co-existed in Egypt for about fourteen centuries. Dialogue is not new, but needs to be renewed. The opening session was attended by prominent Christian and Muslim religious leaders, as well as diplomats and leaders from the civil society.*

The participants issued the following communiqué:

*We are brought together by a strong conviction of the importance of building bridges of understanding and stand united in our commitment to Interfaith Dialogue. This work is vital at a time when nations suffer so much from local, regional and international conflicts. We are united in our view that there is no option other than dialogue which is itself the language of God. Humanity has suffered greatly as a result of wars, ethnic, political and religious conflicts. Much of this strife arose from the conscious promotion of conflict between nations, cultures, religions and civilizations rather than Dialogue**

***Among these leaders were:**

The Grand Mufti of Egypt Dr. Ali Gomma,
The Undersecretary of the Ministry of Endowment and Religious Affairs Dr. Salem, Bishop Johanna Kolta of the Coptic Catholic Church,
Rev. Dr. Andrea Zaky, the Vice-President of the Association of the Evangelical Churches in Egypt,
Sheikh Fawzy the former Deputy of the Grand Imam of Al Azhar,
Professor Abdel Ati Mohammed Abdel Galil representing the World Islamic Call Society in Libya,
Archbishop Michael Fitzgerald, the Papal Nuncio of the Roman Catholic Church,
Rev. Harald Nielsen, the Regional Director of Danmission,
Diplomats from the Tunisian, Algerian and Libyan Embassies, and other representatives.

Special greetings were received from the Nigerian delegation who were unexpectedly delayed and not able to participate in person.

There have been many Interfaith Dialogues in the past few decades, of which too many were confined to the level of religious leaders. These Dialogues did not always achieve the desired impact because of this restriction. We recommend that Dialogue move from the summit to the base; from the level of religious leaders to the popular level of the street.

In the light of these considerations, we affirm:

1. The importance of constructive dialogue which promotes the values of peace, co-existence between all peoples, without any discrimination.
2. The role and involvement of women in such Interfaith Dialogues.
3. The importance of promoting a culture of dialogue among young generations.
4. The need for Christians and Muslims to work together on issues of practical social concern, including: community development, the challenges of poverty, HIV/AIDS, malaria and illiteracy.

5. The importance of correcting misconceptions in the minds of Christians and Muslims.

We are confident that such practical steps will have a most positive impact on the relationship between Christians and Muslims and that they can achieve this across all levels of society. We also wish to note that it is often misconceptions introduced from outside our communities by those who promote religious extremism that disturbs and disrupts our historically evident capacity for peaceful co-existence. It is building upon our longstanding togetherness in the face of shared challenges that will benefit us all.

The participants express their gratitude to those who organized and supported the conference and we commit ourselves strongly to sustaining our programme of future work in this critical arena of our time. The participants are grateful for the support of our respective governments and especially the Egyptian Government for its assistance.

On behalf of the Participants:

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