



Joint Catholic-Lutheran Commemoration

Testimony by Bishop Audo

Dear Pope Francis and Bishop Munib Younan, dear Sisters and Brothers,

On this day of joint commemoration of the Reformation, you have invited all Christians to walk together on the paths of communion. Your invitation to common prayer and thanksgiving to the Lord, as well as your appeal to serve the poorest together, are not arguments or terms of contention and accusation, but rather a new style, new courageous gestures that open up paths of hope before us Christians, and before humanity as a whole. Following Christ, with a gesture of humility, you want us to accept our differences, speak to each other and let God's Mercy prevail over everything.

As Eastern Christians belonging to Muslim and Arab countries from the Middle East, and sharing a long common history of culture, humanism and living dialogue, we cannot stand before you at this memorable time in history without having in our hearts and consciences the conflicts that our Arab and Muslim brothers and sisters are undergoing. The war we are living through every day in Syria, Iraq and the Middle East makes us witnesses of the destruction of our "common house", and the death of innocent people and the poorest.

The majority of hospitals are destroyed and 80 percent of doctors have left Aleppo. In Syria, 3 million children do not attend school. The physical and moral deterioration is read in every face, it reaches everyone, especially the poorest and among them, children, adolescents and old people. Schools and universities are bombarded almost daily.

Our sadness is seeing a rich and beautiful Christianity about to disappear: a deep sense of ecumenism, a lifestyle in which Eastern Christians and Muslims were used to live together getting reduced to fanaticism and distrust. Christians

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of the world, Muslims between East and West, people of good will, do not leave our beloved Syria to be destroyed and fragmented. I hope that the construction of peace listening to the poorest may become the daily bread of humanity and divine inspiration for all religions and beliefs.

Your ecumenical gesture leading Caritas Internationalis and LWF World Service to serve the poorest in one fervour, gives us the necessary strength and courage to get through this grave Syrian crisis. Indeed, in Syria, from now on our humanitarian service motto is "Become Christians together". For us this implies a process of conversion to Christ and rejection of any reflex of exclusion and confinement of our Eastern Churches.

With you we want to break down all the ideological barriers and move together towards everyone, especially those who have been most tried by the war. In fact, religion should not be a source of impediment to encounter, but rather, in mutual respect and attention to the poorest – whether Christian or Muslim – it should encourage us to defend the human values of dignity, solidarity and seeking the common good. Indeed, one of the latest mottos of Syrian Christians working at Caritas to serve everyone is: "Become citizens together".

Dear brothers and sisters in faith, thank you for giving us an example of defence of human dignity through a lifestyle that reveals God's tenderness for every man and woman created in His image. Thank you for asking humanity to seek God's goodness and beauty in the often disfigured faces of the innocent and the poor!