

Council on human rights

Forum on Minority Issues

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Speech given by Mr Elias Khouri, representative of the Union of Arab Jurists (UJA)

Mister President,

I will begin by mentioning article 20 from the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. I quote:

1. Any war propaganda for war shall be prohibited by law.
2. Any advocacy of national, racial or religious hatred that constitutes incitement to discrimination, hostility or violence shall be prohibited by law.

Several months ago, leaders of major countries such as America, Great Britain and France undertook to advocate war against Syria. Israel (which pursues a policy of force within its borders rather than using legal power) supported them. So did the leaders of Turkey and the Gulf states who showed their support by putting their airports and ports at the disposal of the powers who were carrying out violence on Syria. All these actions violate the international convention, in addition, to violating the aims and principles of the Charter of the United Nations.

Moreover, in the last few years, calls have arisen from Jihadis and Salafis inciting extremism, hatred and denial of the other, from the mouths of men of religion invoking civil strife and hatred in peaceful societies.

These movements are supported politically and financially by some countries and institutions which claim to defend and respect human rights.

Thousands of jihadis and mercenaries who come from more than 83 countries have been pushed into fighting against the Arab Syrian army, which is carrying out its national duty according to the Syrian constitution, and into perpetrating terrorist acts in Syria under religious pretexts killing innocent people and taking civilians hostage and using human shields, which has forced the inhabitants to flee. The severity of the attacks with mortars and explosions in public places and on places of worship has reached a level which is truly shocking. The international community has remained silent in the face of these horrors. The main targets of these terrorist acts are Christians and other minority groups wanting to make them flee and leave the Middle East. What happened before in Palestine, Egypt and Iraq is now happening in Syria, and these Christians are the original inhabitants of these countries. This situation led His Holiness Pope Francis to declare earlier this month: “The Middle East without Christians is unacceptable”. This statement shows how grave the situation of Christians in the Middle East has become.

Before the appearance of these heretical movements Christians lived with their Muslim brothers and followers of all other religions for hundreds of years in peace and safety with love, tolerance and acceptance of differences. This is especially true of Syria, the cradle of civilisations.

- The international community must concern itself with human rights, peace and security, supervising the educational programme in religious schools of all creeds in order to eradicate extremism, violence and the denial of others.
- Intensify a visit by the Special Rapporteur on minority issues and on freedom of religion or belief, to countries affected by religious extremism must be increased.

- Drying up the sources of financial, military and media support for these armed terrorist groups which perpetrate corruption and crime in the countries where they fight.
- Submitting those responsible for perpetrating terrorist crimes whether supporters or perpetrators to appropriate international courts.

Thank you, Mr President.