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**Joint Statement on "Supporting the Human Rights of Christians and Other Communities, particularly in the Middle East" at the 28th Session of the Human Rights Council (Geneva, 13 March 2015)**

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The Middle East is living in a situation of instability and conflict that recently have been aggravated. The consequences are disastrous for the entire population of the region. The existence of many religious communities is seriously threatened. Christians are now especially affected. These days even their survival is in question.

Efforts to build a better future for all are frustrated. We witness a situation where violence, religious and ethnic hatred, fundamentalist radicalism, extremism, intolerance, exclusion, destruction of the social fabric of whole societies and communities are becoming the features of a non-viable political and social model, endangering the very existence of many communities, the Christian community in particular.

Millions of people have been either displaced or forced to leave their ancestral lands. Those who stay in conflict zones or areas controlled by terrorist groups live under the permanent threat of human rights violations, repression and abuses. Both communities and individuals fall victim to barbaric acts of violence: they are deprived of homes, driven from their native lands, sold into slavery, killed, beheaded and burnt alive. Dozens of Christian churches, and ancient shrines of all religions have been destroyed. The situation of Christians in the Middle East, a land on which they are living for centuries and have the right to remain, raises deep concerns. There are more and more reasons to fear seriously for the future of the Christian communities that have more than two thousand years of existence in this region, where Christianity has its full place, and began its long history. The positive contributions of Christians in the different countries and societies of the Middle East are well known and creative.

We are confident that Governments, all civic and religious leaders in the Middle East, will join us in addressing this alarming situation by building together a culture of peaceful coexistence. In our globalized world, pluralism is an enrichment. The presence and the contributions of ethnic and religious communities reflect an ancient diversity and a common heritage. A future without the different communities in the Middle East will run a high risk of new forms of violence, exclusion, and the absence of peace and development.

We call upon the international community to support the deeply rooted historical presence of all ethnic and religious communities in the Middle East. Here world religions appeared, including Christianity. Now, they live a

serious existential threat from the so-called "Islamic State" (Daesh) and Alqaida, and affiliated terrorist groups, which disrupts the life of all these communities, and creates the risk of complete disappearance for the Christians. This support will help the countries of the region to rebuild healthy plural societies and sound political systems, ensuring human rights and fundamental freedoms for all. Therefore we ask all States to reaffirm their commitment to respect the rights of everyone, in particular the right to freedom of religion, which is enshrined in the fundamental international human rights instruments

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