

**Proponency presentation by Craig Watts,
Co-Moderator of the Disciples Peace Fellowship**

Early this year there was a study conducted by Duke University and the University of North Carolina. It found that the number of American Muslims suspected of or confirmed to be involved in terror operations significantly decreased in 2010. The same cannot be said for anti-Muslim rhetoric and behavior. As the resolution notes, a major nation-wide poll released last last year showed that the number of Americans with an unfavorable view of Muslims was at the highest level since the 9/11/01 terror attacks. The front of the Nashville *Tennessean* newspaper this past Sunday had a story that dealt with an anti-Muslim organization currently at work right here in this area.

So why all the negativity? A large part of it has to do with unjustifiable claims made by certain political pundits and politicians. Without any evidence, one well-known pundit has claimed that 10% of all Muslims are terrorists. U.S. Representative Peter King alleged that over 80% of American Muslim leaders are extremists, again without any evidence to back up the assertion. U.S. Attorney General Holder has directly contradicted King.

Add to this, certain elements in the Religious Right who have produced a steady stream of anti-Muslim venom by self-annointed "experts." These inspire fear of world domination by Muslims and provoke far-fetched concerns over Shariah law becoming the law of the land, despite the fact that no such proposal has been made by American Muslim leaders.. Frankly, I'm a lot more concerned about extremist Christians who would like to impose their version of biblical law on the rest of us.

This resolution does not attempt to minimize the destructive force of radical Islam or turn a blind eye to the injustice done to women, religious minorities and others in some Muslim societies. Neither does the resolution deny that there are problematic, violent passages in the Koran. But have you opened the Bible and read Deuteronomy 20 lately?

The scriptures tell us that "perfect love casts out fear" (1 John 4:18). Our Lord calls us to be a people of love and that is particularly important in a time when so many are driven by a fear that has led them to issue threats and insults, engage in vandalism of mosques and to practice discrimination toward Muslims in various ways.

Because our lives have been drawn to God by Jesus Christ, "we have been given a ministry of reconciliation" (2 Corinthians 5:18). This resolution promotes one expression of that ministry that is clearly crucial in our time: standing against anti-Muslim action and supporting inter-faith dialogue through Regions and congregations, in addition to that which is already being done through the General Church. I urge you to support this resolution.

Intervention by the Rev. Dr. Michael Kinnamon, General Secretary, National Council of Churches of Christ in the USA.

Much of the ministry done by the National Council of Churches is with interfaith neighbors, especially Muslims and Jews, because the issues of the world demand it. It makes no sense to talk about the Christian response to climate change or global poverty! The problems are simply too massive for any one religious community. So I am thankful that the Islamic Society of North America and the Islamic Circle of North America are partners in carrying out what, after all, is God's mission, not just ours.

The churches of the NCC have also spoken out strongly against anti-Muslim rhetoric and actions, not only for the sake of our Muslim neighbors, but for the sake of Christians in other parts of the world. Last August, when a pastor in Florida threatened to burn the Qur'an, we at the NCC began to hear from followers of Christ in Egypt, Palestine, India, Pakistan, Indonesia and elsewhere that their

communities were feeling threatened by extremists in their countries who were using extreme voices in this country as a pretext. So for their sake, it was important to put a different face on Christianity in the United States.

Sometimes we may wonder what difference it makes to pass a resolution in General Assembly. In this case, it does indeed matter because it adds to the picture of the US church as a community that stands firmly against the disparaging of people of another faith. We stand with them and speak out for them because it is right to do so, but also because we trust that Muslim, Hindu, Jewish, and Buddhist majorities in other countries will stand up for Christians in those places—as, in fact, they have in many instances. As a friend of ours once said, “do unto others as you would have them do unto you.” Please give your approval to this important resolution.

Intervention by Mr. Razek Siriani, Ecumenical Relations Officer, Syrian Orthodox Archdiocese of Aleppo, Syria.

I wish to re-affirm to this Assembly that the Christian-Muslim relations differ from one geo-political context to another. In some places it generates coherence and coexistence; while in others tensions and conflicts. I also wish to re-affirm that the relations with Muslims go beyond romantic and complementary approaches.

- 1) First and foremost, tension between Christian and Muslim communities in some parts of the world is due to the incongruity between the teachings and the practice of both religions, which requires further reconciliation.
- 2) The misconception, ignorance, lack of knowledge and stereotyping among Christians and Muslims are other fundamental obstacles in approaching the other memories and images of the past. These attitudes have in fact generated mistrust and less confidence.
- 3) Dialogue and relations with Muslims cannot remain at the hierarchal institutional level. It must find its ways to the ground level of ordinary people.
- 4) In the Middle East, for centuries the Christians and Muslims coexisted, shared common history, and destiny. However, this type of coexistence is inflicted in the last two decades with extremism and discrimination approaches and practices mostly from Muslims against Christians; which raises basic questions and concerns among Arab Christians.
- 5) Yet, and without entering into a sort of political and historical analysis about the reasons for the rise of Islamic extremism; and bearing in mind that Christian fundamentalism is also there; I would argue by saying that anti-Islamism which was exercised by the West (after 9/11) and “wars on terror” do not help neither Christians in America nor Christians in the Middle East, or elsewhere in the world. If for any reason these actions are eligible, it should by no means integrate either directly or indirectly any connotation of anti-Islamism. We, Christians in the Middle East are suffering and wounded from the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. We are accused by association with the West and America; whereas we are not. We are authentic Christians of that land and we want to continue coexisting in peace, integrating fully in our societies not as aliens rather as true citizens; not affiliated with unidentified identity except of ours.
- 6) Therefore, I urge to work together to open spaces of interactions, consolidate our commonalities, avoid imposing values and attitudes on others, respect the integrity of humanity, attempt to learn from each other with a Christian spirit of openness, mutual respect and tolerance. Christians cannot be anti-people but with people. Consequently, what applies from these factors on Christians, applies also on Muslims.

As Christians in the Middle East, we would welcome such a resolution for one good reason which is that of being a Christian attitude. Thank you

Intervention by the Rev. Didier Crouzet, Ecumenical and International Relations officer for the Reformed Church of France.

As an international guest, I'd like to share with you the experience of my church, the Reformed Church of France.

We are a minority church. In France, Protestants number 2 million; Muslims are 4 million; and Jews are less than 1 million. These three groups are all minorities. We French Protestants know too well in our history what it means to be persecuted for religious reasons, so we are very sensitive about religious freedom. We consider Muslims as part of our society, of our country, and as such they deserve to be heard, to be understood, to be cared for, because they have something to bring to the whole community.

This is why our church created, more than ten years ago, a group of dialog between Protestants and Muslims. We set up recently an annual meeting for religious leaders, including Protestants, Catholics, Muslims, Jews, and Buddhists.

What for? All religions share a common longing for peace. If we want to leave peacefully, we first need to know each other, to understand each other, to cooperate.

My last point is about education, especially for children and youth. Our church encourages congregational youth groups to meet with young Muslims, with young Jews, and with young Catholics. As much as possible, we encourage them to go and visit mosques, synagogues, and Catholics churches. We encourage them to invite believers from others religions to come and meet with Protestants. Educating for peace means making an effort to get to know others' beliefs, religious practices, sanctuaries. It means sharing our vision of the world, our hopes.

If we want peace and justice in this world, interfaith dialogue, especially with Muslims, is essential. As good Christians, we will not build peace alone.