English Abstract

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Islamists and Arab Christians

The present book represents the product of a symposium held by the Amman-based MESC in cooperation with the Royal Institute for Inter-Faith Studies on October 13, 2012. It was joined by a number of experts, politicians and scholars of religion from Egypt, Lebanon and Jordan.

The book explores the structure of the relations between Islamists and Arab Christians and their various challenges, bearing in mind both parties' hopes and fears. The history and future of such ties are investigated in terms of the accelerated events in the Arab World, which have brought the Islamists to power in some Arab countries since 2011.

Chapter One titled "Major Christian Fears and Sentiments towards the Rise of Islamists in the Region" reviews the beginning of direct ties between Muslims and Christians since the Islamic conquest of the region.

Today, although the Arab uprisings have witnessed strong solidarity within the Arab societies regardless of their components, Christian fears come to rise again. As soon as dictators were toppled by the peoples, the Islamists came to the fore as the main political, public power, raising those old accumulations in the minds of many. Therefore, it has become necessary to warn against religious extremism and sectarian troubles, which are considered by the book to be a major reason leading to the failure of these revolts.

The genuine guarantee for the unity and protection of Arab societies from such dangers is to emphasize the conceptions of social justice and religious freedom as well as enforce them in actual laws. Common ground between various segments needs to be enhanced under what is called 'Cultural Arabism', which has,

in various historical stages, played a fundamental role in unifying them and safeguarding minorities from 'threats to their existence'.

Section Two of Chapter One discusses the Islamists' vision of treating Arab Christians. It begins with Islam's kindness and equality between humans irrespective of their faiths and races, citing Qur'anic verses, Hadith traditions and historical incidents. Islamists are taking these Islamic values into consideration when dealing with Arab Christians.

Despite of the justified Arab Christians' fears, an optimistic picture is drawn for the future according to near past examples during the Arab Spring. The peoples have rebelled against injustice and they will never allow for its return at any form. However, Islamists should be given the chance to correct previous dictator regime's mistakes as well as rectify misconceptions fixed in some people's minds due to colonization and one-sided media propaganda.

The book commends the Islamists' stances and achievements in this field in the last few years, especially in Iraq, Syria, Jordan – in their 2005 vision for reform – and Egypt – led by the Freedom and Justice Party.

Chapter One is concluded by relating success in enhancing national unity to the ability of Islamists, Christians and those politicians 'committed to the culture of the nation' to meet and agree on joint internal and external programmes in the service of the major issues of the Arab nation.

Away from the past, Chapter Two moves to the Arab uprisings and their influence on Arab Christians, who do not deny their advantages on various levels. Nevertheless, due to the state of instability and its existential threats in the region, some of them are migrating to the West. The latest developments have been used by the West to evacuate Christians from the region in a

bid to eliminate diversity, consolidate mono-cultural closemindedness and prevent civilizational communication between Arab Mashreq countries, where Christians have been playing a major role. Section One concludes with the main actions proposed for Arab Christians to secure their survival in their homes and practice their message.

Section Two of Chapter Two investigates the possibility of setting a shared Islamic-Christian Arab vision for the modern states emerging after the Arab Spring. Such a plan should grant an active role for the youth, who made those revolts and practiced true national unity. Then, it would focus on common economic, social and dignity concerns and motives, which also unified them at that time.

The book urges to abandon questions of minorities and majorities in favour of equal citizenship. Christians are requested to forget the demands for protection, ignore messages of frightening and join political and social life, without any polarization on a religious basis fearing the loss of their rights.

Furthermore, within the shared vision, elites of both parties should care for the intellectual side to reconsider political choices as well as review the structure and discourse of religious institutions. The book proposes working on constitutional, statutory and societal levels to translate such agreements into reality in the new Arab states.

In conclusion, hopes are set on the Arab people's capability for a change towards the building of societies where Arabs – regardless of their differences – can live without fear, oppression or loss of natural rights and the Islamists have expressed their commitment to such implications in their participation of leadership of new Arab states.