

Al Azhar London 2005

The Joint Committee, which is composed of a delegation from the Anglican Communion and from the Permanent Committee of al-Azhar al-Sharif for Dialogue with the Monotheistic Religions, held its fourth annual meeting in Al-Azhar at Lambeth Palace, London on 15 September 2005 which corresponds to 11 Shaban 1426. This was held in accord with the agreement signed at Lambeth Palace on 30 January 2002 by the Archbishop of Canterbury and the Grand Imam of al-Azhar.

The theme of our dialogue in 2005 has been Christians and Muslims as minorities and majorities in the Middle East and the West. The Joint Committee learned about developments in various parts of the world and in particular from the Most Revd Alexander Malik about the situation in Pakistan. The Joint Committee heard and discussed the following papers presented by Christian members of the Committee:

- The relationship of religion to the state, to law and to peace (The Rt Revd Dr Michael Nazir Ali)
- Christian minorities in Islamic countries (The Rt Revd Dr Mouneer H Anis)
- Political, Legal and Social Questions for minorities and majorities – a Christian perspective from Britain (The Revd Canon Dr Christopher Lamb)

The Joint Committee also heard and discussed the following papers presented by Muslim members of the Committee:

- Minorities in the Islamic Community (Shaykh Fawzy el-Zefzaf)
- Muslims as Minorities in the West (Dr Zaki Badawi)
- The role of the media in enhancing interfaith (Dr Ali El Samaan)

All members of the Committee for dialogue strongly condemned the terrorist attacks which took place in London and Sharm el-Sheikh during July 2005.

Such recent events in both the Middle East and the West reminded us strongly how important it was for religious minorities, both Christian and Muslim, to be able to live in peace and security, and as full participants in the political and social life of the country of which they were citizens. The majority religious community has the duty to facilitate this, both as a religious obligation and for the well-being of society.

It is equally important that religious minorities should seek to abide by the law of the country where they are resident, or of which they are citizens. We noted specifically that Islam calls for Muslims to abide by and respect the laws and regulations of the non-Islamic countries where they live.

We had a particular concern for freedom of religion and the right to worship. We hold that this is an important human right, and that there should be reciprocity in this respect between communities which are predominantly Christian and those which are predominantly Muslim.

We acknowledged that in our 'globalised' world, international events and conflicts often contributed to, or exacerbated, regional, national or local tensions, or were used by extremists to try to justify terrorist activity. We call upon political and religious leaders to work to resolve such conflicts in a way that respects the right to self-determination of all people. In the awareness of the changing political situation in the Palestinian territories, we expressed our hope that developments there might be an important step on a path that would eventually allow for both the right of the Palestinian people to national self-determination and to the right of Israel to live in peace and security.

A particular focus of the dialogue meeting in 2005 was the signing of a study exchange agreement between members of the Joint Committee in the presence of the Archbishop of Canterbury and the Egyptian Ambassador to the United Kingdom, to inaugurate a study exchange process which would allow younger scholars, both Christian and Muslim, from Egypt and the United Kingdom, to spend time studying in religious institutions of the other faith. We believe that it is particularly important at the present time that the commitment to work toward inter faith understanding should be owned by younger as well as older members of our faith communities.

We agreed that the Joint Committee should meet again in autumn 2006.

Signed

On behalf of the Anglican Communion

Rt Revd Michael Nazir-Ali, Bishop of Rochester Chair Al Azhar Dialogue Committee

Rt Revd Mouneer Anis, Bishop of Egypt Vice-Chair Al Azhar Dialogue Committee

Most Revd Alexander Malik, Bishop of Lahore, Moderator of Church of Pakistan

Canon Christopher Lamb

On behalf of al-Azhar al-Sharif

Sheikh Fawzy el Zef-zef

Dr Ali El Samman

Dr Zaki Badawi