

Al-Azhar Declaration on Citizenship and Coexistence Issued by His Eminence the Grand Imam of Al-Azhar

In the Name of Allah, Most Gracious, Most Merciful

In response to the persisting needs which our Arab communities seek to fulfill,

As part of our efforts to overcome the challenges facing religion, the society, and the patriotic countries,

Being cognizant of the substantial dangers facing the unique experience of religious diversity of our societies and march of civilization,

Pursuant to the individual and joint efforts, documents, and, initiatives launched by Al-Azhar as well as other civil and religious institutions in the Arab World over the recent years,

Out of the Muslim-Christian common firm will to achieve peaceful coexistence, to reject extremism, and to condemn the violent acts and the crimes perpetrated in the name of religion which has nothing to do with them and as declared in the final communiqué of "*Al-Azhar's Conference on Countering Extremism and Terrorism*" of 2014 and the subsequent conferences and joint forums,

Al-Azhar Al-Sharif and the Muslim Council of Elders (MCE) have decided to organize this conference titled, "*Freedom, Citizenship, Diversity, and Integration*" which has received more than 200 participants representing the religious, civil, cultural, and political elites of sixty countries, from both the Arab Nation and the whole world. A great number of Egyptian religious men, politicians, intellectuals, and journalists also attended it.

The conference lasted for two days (28 February–1st March 2017) where lectures and discussions have been held about the issues of citizenship and diversity along with a review of the experiences, challenges, initiatives, and contributions put forward in this regard.

The participants in the conference agreed to issue Al-Azhar Declaration containing the following provisions:

First, the concept of 'Citizenship' has its origin in Islam as it was perfectly applied in the constitutional document of Madinah and the subsequent covenants and treaties in which Prophet Muhammad, peace and blessings be upon him, defined the relationships between Muslim and non-Muslims. The Declaration stresses that citizenship is not just a desirable solution but rather a necessary recalling of the first Islamic application of the fairest system of governance to the first Muslim community in the state of Madinah. The prophet's application of citizenship was totally free of any discrimination against any category of the

society at that time; it featured policies based on religious, racial, and social pluralism. Such pluralism could only prosper in an environment of full citizenship and equality under the constitutional document of Madinah. The document stated clearly that all citizens of Madinah must be treated equally in terms of their rights and responsibilities, that they together constitute one nation, regardless of their different races and religions, and that non-Muslims have the same rights given to Muslims and are required to fulfill the same obligations imposed on Muslims.

Further to this practical model, Muslim and Arab communities have a rich heritage that features the practice of peaceful coexistence within the society based on diversity and mutual recognition.

Since these principles of tolerance and peaceful values are still facing internal and external challenges, Al-Azhar Al-Sharif, the MCE, and the figures of the leading Christian communities have met today to reaffirm the importance of equality between Muslims and Christians in terms of the rights and responsibilities defined by the state. Indeed, both Muslims and Christians are considered one nation in which both religions are freely practiced and this goes in line with the provisions stated in the Constitution of Madinah which was ratified by Prophet Muhammad, peace and blessings be upon him.

Therefore, the national responsibilities must be shared by all the members of societies regardless of their religion.

Second, the adoption of citizenship and equality requires the denouncement of any practices that contradict the principle of citizenships. Such practices which the Islamic Law totally rejects are often based on discrimination against either Muslim or Christians and inevitably result in contempt behaviors, marginalization, and double standard policies, not to mention the forced displacement of civilians and the killing of innocent lives, etc. All such practices are totally rejected by Islam, the divine religions, and the international norms.

The most important factor of strengthening the national unity and the common will is the patriotic, constitutional state which is established in accordance with the principles of citizenship, equality, and the rule of law. Therefore, excluding the concept of citizenship as a sort of contract between citizens and communities will inevitably lead to the failure of the whole state, its religious institutions, and the political and cultural organizations. As a consequence, the comprehensive development and the march of progress will be impeded and the enemies will find their opportunity to destabilize our countries, steal our wealth, and control our future.

Moreover, turning our back to the concept of citizenship and its requirements will give rise to pro-minorities calls and the demands for minority rights. Based on this understanding, we hope, in this Declaration, that the intellectuals and thinkers will show awareness of the

bad consequences of the excessive use of the term 'minorities'. That is because this term has implications of discrimination and separation under the pretext of protecting minorities' rights. Over the recent years, we have witnessed a rise in the use of the term 'minorities' which we thought had disappeared with the end of colonialism age. Now, it is being re-used to promote division between Muslims and Christians, even between Muslims themselves, because it leads to having loyalties and affiliations to external hostile policies.

Third, due to the rise in the wave of extremism, violence, and terrorism, over the past decade, in the name of religion and the resulting serious repercussions on the followers of other religions in our societies in terms the pressures, intimidation, forced displacement, and kidnapping, both Muslim and Christian participants in Al-Azhar Conference declare that all divine religions have nothing to do with terrorism in any form. They further strongly denounce it.

The participants ask those who accuse Islam or any other divine religion of having any link to terrorism to immediately stop leveling such false accusations that many have taken them as true because of such deliberate and non-deliberate mistakes and false statements.

The participants, assembled at this conference, believe that holding Islam accountable for the actions of those who claim to be Muslims will open the door to accuse all the divine religions of terrorism. This will give an excuse to the pro-modernity fanatics who claim that religions must be totally eliminated to guarantee stability for human communities.

Fourth, it is the top duty of the state now to protect the citizens' lives, freedom, properties, as well as their right to citizenship and human dignity. The state can never be absolved of such duty for the protection of its people and their rights. However, no other party whatsoever should intervene in the state's efforts towards fulfilling such duty. History is full of clear examples confirming the fact that the weakness of the state results in the violation of its citizens' rights. The cultural and national elites concerned with the public interest of all the Arab nations share their states' responsibilities towards countering mass violence regardless of its racial, cultural, or social motives.

Since we share the same destiny, we all are required to show solidarity and to work together to preserve our human, social, and religious existence. We share the same grieves and the same interests. Therefore, we have to take a joint action in order to translate our feelings into a positive practice in all the religious, social, cultural, and national aspects of our life.

Fifth, over the recent years, all of us have exerted great efforts for revision, correction, and rehabilitation at both the individual and institutional levels. Indeed, we Muslims and Christians alike are constantly in need of renewal and development of our culture and the practices of our institutions. As part of these efforts, we have enhanced the communication

between the religious institutions in the Arab World and the whole globe; we established close ties with the Vatican, Canterbury Cathedral, the World Council of Churches, etc.

We also look forward to establishing more cooperation between all the religious, cultural, and media institutions in the Arab World to work together in the areas of raising religious guidance, promoting ethical and patriotic values, and developing mutual relationships based on a common understanding between the Arab and the international religious institutions. In so doing, we can achieve the goal of establishing Muslim-Christian cross-culture dialogue.

Sixth, Al-Azhar Al-Sharif and the MCE hopes that this conference will be the start for establishing a renewable partnership or a contract between all Arab citizens, Muslims and Christians as well as those who have other religious affiliations, based on the values of common understanding, mutual recognition, citizenship, and freedom. What we aspire for is no longer an optimal choice but rather an indispensable solution to our crises and for the development of our countries, human societies and the generations to come. Indeed, Prophet Muhammad, peace and blessings be upon him, set a wonderful example for such community partnership by "the people who get on a ship after casting lots. Some of them are on its lower deck and some of them in its upper (deck). Those who are in its lower (deck), when they require water, go to the occupants of the upper deck, and say to them, 'If we make a hole in the bottom of the ship, we shall not harm you.'" Commenting on their attitude, the Prophet, peace and blessings be upon him, said, "If the occupants of the upper deck leave them to carry out their plan they all will be drowned. But if they do not let them go ahead (with their plan), all of them will remain safe".

Now, we are in the same boat since we constitute one society; we face serious dangers that threaten our lives, countries, and religions. Therefore, we want to work hard together to save our societies and countries and to correct our relationship with the whole world by virtue of our common will and the fact that we share the same destiny. Only by doing this we shall provide bright future and a better life for our children.

All Muslims and Christians, assembled at this conference, reiterate their brotherliness and their rejection of any attempts to divide them by claiming that Christians are targeted in their homelands. They further confirm that whatever terrorism does, it will never succeed in ending our joint experience of peaceful coexistence or undermining our common will for the protection of our societies as well as the promotion of citizenship, in both theory and practice.

May God grant us success in our endeavors. Indeed, God Almighty is Sufficient for us, and He is the Best Disposer of affairs.

Peace be upon all of you!