

INTERFAITH INSIGHT

Religious freedom for Christians and Jews in Muslim countries

By Rev. Richard Killmer

Freedom of religion is important to Americans and is guaranteed by the Constitution. No one should be prohibited from worshipping as they wish.

It is wrong that people in any nation of the world are prohibited from worshipping and living out faith as they choose. Consequently, we wish religious prosecution, usually of religious minorities, would end in all of the countries of the world.

It certainly has been true that the rights of Christians and other religions have not always been protected by Muslim-majority nations, just as Muslims and Jews in the U.S. have faced intol-



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erance and bigotry. It should be said that attacks in Muslim nations often are carried out by independent terrorist groups, as dangerous to those governments and other Muslims as they are to Christians and Jews. Similarly, hate groups in the U.S. pose threats to the welfare of us all. These groups are very difficult for governments to eradicate.

On Jan. 25-27, Muslim leaders from many countries met in Marrakesh, Morocco, to determine how to guarantee the rights of religious minorities in Muslim-majority countries.

Muslim scholars, jurists, religious leaders and government officials approved the historic Marrakesh Declaration on safeguarding the rights of religious minorities in Muslim nations. The declaration was motivated by the increased violence and persecution faced by religious minorities

across the Muslim world, particularly Christians in the Middle East. The declaration came at the end of the three-day conference in Marrakesh and is rooted in the Medina Charter, the Prophet Muhammad's law establishing a multifaith society in Medina. The conference was sponsored by King Mohammed VI, of Morocco, and the Forum for Promoting Peace in Muslim Societies.

NEW CONTRACT, OLD ROOTS

"Today, there are unfortunate circumstances for religious minorities in Muslim majority countries," said Shaykh Bin Bayyah, president of the forum. "For this reason, we put forth a new contract with old roots that will respect their private lives and under which they can enjoy the freedom to practice their faiths."

The Marrakesh Declaration draws on traditional Islamic

Law, asserting Islam requires the protection and full citizenship rights of religious minorities in Muslim nations. Organizers hope to encourage Muslim nations to adopt the declaration as formal Islamic law.

It calls for the "full protection for the rights and liberties of all religious groups in a civilized manner that eschews coercion, bias and arrogance." It states "it is unconscionable to employ religion for the purpose of aggressing upon the rights of religious minorities in Muslim countries" and calls for "restoring our shared trust that has been eroded by extremists using acts of terror and aggression."

More than 250 Muslim leaders, representatives of historically persecuted religious communities, interfaith allies and government officials convened in Marrakesh for this groundbreaking

conference. It included presentations from leading Muslim scholars and the formal drafting and signing of the declaration.

The conference went a long way to encourage Muslim nations to ensure they protect the rights of religious minorities, including Christians and Jews. The next steps include urging Muslim nations to codify the Marrakesh Declaration. Nations, such as Tunisia, included such guarantees in its new constitution. It can be done.

At the same time, it is important to welcome Muslims in our country, ensuring that they do not face anti-Muslim bigotry.

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