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Religious liberty partnership voices concern for minority believers in Middle East and North Africa

Religious freedom organizations united under the [Religious Liberty Partnership](#) (RLP) have released a statement on the Middle East and North Africa, in light of the recent democracy protests. The statement calls on governments in the region to “Ensure that all citizens are granted the foundational human right to adopt a religion or belief of their choice,” and makes recommendations for integrating freedom of religion into newly formed governments.

“As members of the Religious Liberty Partnership (RLP), we have closely observed the protests held in many Middle Eastern and North African countries,” reads the statement, “We welcome the widespread calls for greater freedom and strongly endorse these aspirations. We believe that freedom, equality and justice for all are essential for the development and cohesion of societies.

The RLP Statement, however, “notes with concern the violence against peaceful protesters at different times and places.” The partnership expresses that, “There can be no true freedom without freedom of thought, conscience and religion,” adding that “the essence of humanity requires the ability to investigate the origin and meaning of human existence, and to adopt a belief of one’s choosing.”

Stephen Carter, CEO of Middle East Concern, says that, “The contagious optimism which spread from Tunisia and Egypt is increasingly giving way to disenchantment and fear as legitimate aspirations for reform and freedom are repressed or under threat from other agendas.” Carter states that it is “vital that the international community redouble efforts to work with the peoples and governments of the Middle East and North Africa towards building free societies in which the fundamental rights of all are respected, including the foundational right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion.”

The partnership calls on Middle Eastern governments to include the challenge to “Recognize the right to teach, manifest, and disseminate one’s religion or belief,” as well as to “Ensure that all citizens have the right to take their religious faith into the public sphere to inform public policy debate, recognizing that it is a common feature of many faiths that ethical aspects of the faith should impact all aspects of life.”

“In observing the current events unfolding in many Middle Eastern countries I am excited at the possibilities for real progress to come from these events, said Mervyn Thomas, Chairman of the RLP and CEO of Christian Solidarity Worldwide, UK. “Now is a great opportunity for Christians across the region to show that, as national citizens, they have a role to play in bringing about justice for all peoples and recognition that this cannot be achieved without full religious freedom.”

The Religious Liberty Partnership (RLP) is a collaborative effort of Christian organizations around the world focused on religious liberty. The RLP seeks to more intentionally work together in addressing advocacy, assistance, and in raising the awareness of religious liberty issues globally. Besides Mervyn Thomas, the RLP Leadership Team is made of: Ron Boyd-Macmillan, Open Doors International; Anne Brandner, Global Peace Initiative; Andy Dipper, Release International, UK; Daniel Hoffman of Middle East Concern; Linus Pfister, HMK Switzerland; and Godfrey Yogarajah of the World Evangelical Alliance. An entire listing of RLP members is on the Middle East Statement.

Notes to Editors:

1. A copy of the Middle East Statement is available [here](#).