

# The Gulf war and the Christian Arabs

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Many world leaders in East and West, have exploited and misused religion and tried to inject God as an integral part of the Gulf crisis. Each side tried to say that God is standing on their side in fighting the enemy. At the same time we saw that many world leaders who took part in the war were praying and asking divine help to win, instead of working and praying for dialogue, justice, and peace. Of course they prayed for their thrones and for the success of their sophisticated weapons as well as the annihilation of their enemies. Only at the end did they pray for their soldiers. From a Christian point of view, these prayers are no different from the hypocritical Pharisees' prayers about which Jesus had a clear position.

Our God, in Whom we believe, is the God of all, for He created all of us in His image. He is a Father for all of us and not only for self-serving leaders. God is with those who are with him. And whoever is with God cannot liquidate his fellow men who are in the image of God. For if someone shoots a human being it means he is shooting God and his conscience.

So consequently, all those who wanted God to be on their side and all those who misused religion in this war and thought that God was with them, were unrealistic and wrong. God is with those who are praying for more dialogue, justice, peace.

Today, after the war, many of our friends in the West are asking us: How could this Gulf war affect the Arab Christians? Such a question is legitimate and of course they are asking it because they are worried and confused. This because Iraq declared a Holy War (*jihad*) against its enemies and spoke about a new crusade because they saw Mr. Bush and Queen Elizabeth praying for the annihilation of the Iraqi soldiers.

The truth is that religion does not have anything to do with this war and never was a reason: not during the Crusades or before or after. Religion is a source for love, for justice, and peace. Colonialism and imperialism were always reasons for enmity, invasion, and oppression. The Gulf war was, for

us, a colonialist and imperialist one which we Christians in the Middle East were against.

Since the beginning of the crisis, many Eastern Church leaders warned about the dangers of the war and how it could negatively affect the Christian presence in the Middle East. Such a position was understood by some Western Church leaders and organizations but many didn't hear us or understand that.

But once again, the Eastern Church tried to overcome the crisis, especially in Iraq, Jordan, and in the Holy Land, by having a clear position which can be summarized as follows:

1) Yes to more dialogue and encounter and yes to the international law and to the application of all United Nations resolutions regarding the Middle East.

2) No to the Western presence in the Gulf and no to the imperialist war and to negative Western interfering in the Arab world.

This position of the Eastern Church is not a new one. It's historical and we can find a real identification of the Arab

## Message of Pan-Islamic Conference to the Pope

"The Muslim people and states are available to consolidate the dialogue with Christians," reads a message sent from Jeddah to Vatican City by the general secretary of the Organization of the Islamic Conference, Hamid Algarid, on March 7. Algarid's letter wishes "full success" to the "historic meeting," and stresses "great attention" with which the Islamic world has looked at the repeated appeals of the Pope in favor of "a peace in the Middle East, based on law, justice, and equality."

The letter also says that it is necessary to consolidate the Islamic-Christian dialogue, which "represents a determining factor for peace and progress of humanity, particularly in those regions where Muslims and Christians have lived close to each other for centuries and share the same dangers and hopes. Christians and Muslims still today fear the tragedies which have caused generations of martyrs, in particular in the Middle East, and hope that all this does not continue, and that the peoples of this region, so dear to our believers' hearts, do not continue to be subjected to injustices and to inequalities." Algarid in particular mentioned the Palestinian people, victims of a "grave injustice which has lasted too long."