

European Christians and Jews Join Forces to Fight Religious Persecution

Christians and Jews in Europe have joined forces in urging the European Union in Brussels to protect persecuted Christians and other religious minorities in the Middle East, and to step up the fight against anti-Semitism in Europe.

A joint statement of unity between Christians and Jews was handed over to Christian Berger, the top E.U. official for Middle East policies, recently in connection with a conference in the European Parliament in Brussels.

The statement calls for the creation of internationally monitored safe havens for refugees in Syria and Iraq. The proposal has the backing of the largest political faction in the European Parliament, the conservative European Peoples Party.

At the conference, ECI Founding Director Tomas Sandell noted that the only group to have raised their voices on behalf of the Christians in the Middle East is the Jewish community. Israeli ambassador to the U.N. Ron Prosor has several times raised the issue on a U.N. level in New York and the head of the World Jewish Congress, Ron Lauder, has publicly voiced his concern over the plight of Christians in the Middle East and other parts of the world where they, and other religious minorities, suffer under radical Islam.

Apart from the European Jewish Congress, European Coalition for Israel and the Pentecostal European Fellowship, the appeal was also signed by Reverend Majed El Shafie. Shafie is a native Egyptian who had to flee Egypt after having converted to Christianity and started to ask critical questions about his own government.

El Shafie eventually found refuge in Israel, the longstanding enemy of Egypt. Today he directs the religious liberty organization "One Free World International" out of Toronto, Canada.

"When people ask me why I, as an Egyptian, have become a friend of Israel, I answer them with one word: Jesus," Shafie said. "If Jesus can make an Egyptian like me love the Jewish people, he cannot be all that bad."

The plight of persecuted Christians in Syria and Iraq has largely been neglected by the Western governments but the topic is nevertheless hotly debated in the European Parliament, where many parties still object to the European governments taking a more active role in the conflict zone.

In a continent with deep mistrust between Christians and Jews, the joint signing of the appeal was an historical occasion. In her speech to the conference, Executive Vice President of the European Jewish Congress Raya Kalenova praised the Christian delegates for their steadfast support for Israel and the Jewish people.

The appeal comes only two months before the 70th anniversary of the liberation of the Auschwitz-Birkenau concentration camp. The anniversary comes at a time of rising anti-Semitism and many Jews no longer feel at home in Europe.

But the appeal also warns for the risk of a new genocide, this time against Christians in the Middle East.

"While the Holocaust may have been hidden from the public eye, the genocide in Syria and Iraq is taking place on social media before our very own eyes. History will not forgive us if we fail to take action now," Kalenova said.

The European Coalition for Israel was founded in Brussels in 2003 in order to promote good relations between Europe and Israel and fight new forms of anti-Semitism. It is today the

only pan-European Christian pro-Israel group to be accredited to the European Union.