

A Common Statement on Engagement for Peace and Justice

by the Arbeitsgemeinschaft Christlicher Kirchen (ACK)¹
and Islamic Religious Communities and Initiatives
in Baden-Württemberg

Preface

In a time of social polarization and extremist political positions, our world needs solid foundations for common action.

When refugees are mercilessly excluded and their hardship is cynically played down, we need common sources of mercy and respect.

At a time when human rights are violated and human lives brutally extinguished, we seek the religious foundations of peace, justice and human dignity.

Christians and Muslims, each in their own way, know that they are sustained by God's love – and that they are committed to loving God and their fellow human beings.

When they remember this, – together – they can contribute to overcoming injustice and war, mercilessness and violence, and to alleviating the suffering of refugees. Out of the innermost motives and resources of their faith, they can help to solve interpersonal conflicts, and even societal or global crises.

To this we commit ourselves with this Common Statement. We call on Muslims and Christians to rise to the challenge and advocate together for peace and justice.

Stuttgart, in March 2016

1. From shared convictions ...

The Christian-Muslim Theological Forum was launched in 2011, bringing together the “Encounter with Islam” working group of the Council of Christian Churches (ACK) in Baden Württemberg and members of Islamic religious communities and initiatives. It has since met twice a year.

Inspired by the Letter of 138 Muslim Scholars entitled “A Common Word” (2007) and after intensive theological dialogue, the Forum participants have come up with the following Common Statement:

1. We share the conviction that our *faith in God*, our religion, is of decisive significance for our lives and for our living together. This is a fundamental fact for us as believers – both Christian and Muslim.
2. We share the conviction that *theological reflection and dialogue* between us is not only necessary but also possible and fruitful. In our experience, this strengthens our own religious convictions and ethical motivation.
3. In theological conversations, we have reached the joint conviction that our faith in God entails a clear *commitment to peace and justice*. The voice of conscience keeps this commitment alive in us. The love in our hearts presses us to put it into action.

¹ Council of Christian Churches in Baden-Württemberg.

4. We share the conviction that, apart from political forces, *religiously motivated convictions* play a major role in promoting peace and justice. Peace increases when we share it. Together, we reject the instrumentalizing of religion for any cause.
5. We share the conviction that mutual acceptance and recognition prove themselves first in personal relationships, family ties and neighbourly relationships, in hospitality and friendliness towards strangers. From these practical, every-day relationships to our “neighbours” (Luke 10:25-36, Sura 2:177), mutual acceptance and recognition radiate *into society and into the world* in favour of peace and justice.

2. ... in responsibility before God ...

1. Despite all the differences in our understanding of God, we share the belief that God is the *Creator and Lord of the world* – both visible and invisible. As God’s creatures, human beings are meant to lead a responsible life in peace and justice, one that is pleasing to God. Our relationship to God – peace with God – gives us the freedom and strength to do so.
2. We share the belief that God loves humankind and that God’s mercy is infinite. *Love of God and of our neighbour* - as a fellow creature - is the central and fundamental command of the Creator to us human beings (Matthew 22:38-40; Sura 2:165). All other commandments build on and align themselves to this – including our responsibility for creation.
3. Muslims believe that the one God – according to his mercy – leads them by the Qur’an and according to the example of the prophet Muhammad *s.a.w.s.* (May the peace and blessing of Allah be upon him) to dedication to God and to responsibility for their fellow human beings (Sura 3:31).
4. Christians believe, in accordance with the Gospel, that in Jesus Christ, true God and true human being, is revealed the love of God for humanity and, at the same time, the fulfilment of the double commandment to love God and one’s neighbour.
5. As Christians and Muslims, we both experience and believe that the *diversity* of creation, of culture and religious convictions – with all of their discrepancies – challenge us to *get to know God and each other even better* (Sura 49:13; Romans 15:7) and to *accept each other in our diversity*.
6. For Christians, just as for Muslims, this challenge is at once an imperative, a duty, and also a blessing. By *getting to know my differently-minded neighbour* I can reduce prejudices and review my own attitudes at the same time. In this way, we can become involved with each other and learn how to cope with our differences in a peaceful atmosphere of respect for the dignity of the other.
7. Even if we should not find any other common ground, not even on religious matters, we *know*, both Christians and Muslims, that our relationship with God (“serve none but God”) commits us to stand up for peace and justice on issues great and small. In this, we all agree with the Letter of 138 Muslim Scholars (Sura 3:64; Exodus 20:3).
8. Joint engagement, practical cooperation for peace and justice may be derived from *different* principles and attitudes, justified by different religious arguments and put into practice on the basis of different motivations.

9. As Christians and Muslims, we know that we are committed to take *joint* action for peace. After all, Christians and Muslims *are involved in* many of the world's conflicts, are *caught up in* or in some way *affected by* them. We are especially committed since questionable and unfounded religious rationales have caused and intensified such conflicts, or complicated the search for solutions.
10. In view of this, we should agree to “vie with each another only in righteousness and good works” (Sura 5:48; Galatians 6:9) as suggested in the Letter of 138 Muslim Scholars.

The experience of our Christian-Muslim Theological Forum (since 2011) has shown that it pays off to patiently remain in dialogue. Beneficial encounters with people ready to engage in open theological discourse encourage us to see, understand and respect each other as believers.

3. ... jointly committed ...

Aware of this, *we commit ourselves* and call on others to stand up together for peace, justice and the integrity of creation, for respect of human dignity and religious freedom, both here and all over the world.

With sadness we observe violent conflicts, both worldwide and in our place. Together, we know of violence and aggression. We recognize the challenge and also the difficulties religious communities have in dealing with it, but we reject the allegation that religions themselves are responsible for violence and aggression. *Therefore*, we commit ourselves and call on others to rediscover, strengthen and highlight the impetus and potential for peace inherent in religion.

We recognize the danger of intensifying existing differences, maintaining supposed lines of conflict and construing new areas of opposition. *Therefore* we commit ourselves and call on others to engage in the joint resolution of conflict and education for peace, awareness-raising and dialogue, everyday encounters and shared festivities, dismantling prejudices and cooperating in charitable work and development assistance.

Knowing that, both as Christians and as Muslims, we are committed to *meeting these challenges together* wherever possible, by our faith in God through the commandment of love, we call upon Christian and Muslim institutions to tackle these activities together.

4. ... we take up the challenge

The current crisis in dealing with the situation of refugees inside and outside of Europe illustrates that these are not just abstract ideas but a practical necessity.

It is evident that religious communities have a *special responsibility* in this matter. They possess – each on their own – good qualifications for understanding the current situation and its causes, as well as for handling it responsibly. Christians and Muslims know – each in their own way – their life and actions to be grounded in the mercy of God and the divine commandment of love. Many Christians and Muslims therefore find it quite normal to take action and lend a hand.

Our joint reflections in the Christian-Muslim Theological Forum clearly show that religious communities can more effectively do their part in accomplishing the tasks at hand when they act *together*, in conscious and focused cooperation. This “Common Statement” is meant to be a reminder of the religious foundations for such cooperation.

On this basis, the actual *shape and opportunities* of practical cooperation must and can be sought, found and developed together – especially concerning the readiness to assist in receiving and supporting refugees regardless of religious affiliation or political interest.

This kind of assistance is not limited to the humanitarian activities of mercy and neighbourly love in Germany. It also points the political decision-makers towards the need to combat the root causes of displacement and to show solidarity with refugee support programs in the respective regions of origin and in other countries receiving refugees.

The Christian-Muslim Theological Forum of the Arbeitsgemeinschaft Christlicher Kirchen (ACK) and Islamic religious communities and initiatives in Baden-Württemberg

Islamic associations participating

- DITIB – Islamische Religionsgemeinschaft, Baden und Württemberg
- Gesellschaft für Dialog Baden-Württemberg (GfD)
- Islamische Glaubensgemeinschaft Baden-Württemberg (IGBW)
 - Islamische Gemeinschaft Stuttgart (Bosnische Gemeinde)
 - Islamisches Zentrum Bilal-Moschee (Afrikanische Gemeinde)
 - Islamisch albanische Moscheegemeinden in Baden-Württemberg
 - Islamisch arabische Moscheegemeinden in Baden-Württemberg
 - Moscheegemeinden der Islamischen Gemeinschaft Milli Görü (IGMG) in Baden-Württemberg
- Landesverband der Islamischen Kulturzentren (LVIKZ) in Baden-Württemberg

ACK member churches in Baden-Württemberg

- Armenisch-Apostolische Orthodoxe Kirche
- Bund Evangelisch-Freikirchlicher Gemeinden Landesverband Baden-Württemberg
- Council of Anglican Episcopal Churches in Germany / Anglikanische Arbeitsgemeinschaft in Deutschland
- Die Heilsarmee
- Evangelische Brüder-Unität Herrnhuter Brüdergemeine
- Evangelische Landeskirche in Baden
- Evangelische Landeskirche in Württemberg
- Evangelisch-Lutherische Kirche in Baden
- Evangelisch-methodistische Kirche
- Griechisch-Orthodoxe Metropolie von Deutschland Exarchat von Zentraleuropa
- Katholisches Bistum der Alt-Katholiken in Deutschland Landessynodalbezirk Baden-Württemberg
- Mülheimer Verband Freikirchlich-Evangelischer Gemeinden
- Römisch-Katholische Kirche Erzdiözese Freiburg
- Römisch-Katholische Kirche Diözese Rottenburg-Stuttgart
- Selbständige Evangelisch-Lutherische Kirche
- Serbisch-Orthodoxe Diözese für Mitteleuropa Dekanat für Süddeutschland
- Syrisch-Orthodoxe Kirche von Antiochien in Deutschland
- Verband der Mennonitengemeinden in Baden-Württemberg
- Volksmission entschiedener Christen

Consulting Members

- Bund Freier evangelischer Gemeinden in Deutschland, Baden-Württemberg Nord- und Südkreis
- Bund Freikirchlicher Pfingstgemeinden

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