



Insights & Analysis

By His beatitude patriarch
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The Future of Eastern Christianity: Pluralism, Citizenship, and the Crisis of the Middle Eastern State

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Introduction

This speech is not merely an ecclesiastical intervention delivered at an international conference concerning the status of Christians in the Middle East; rather, it is a testament to a long history of human and cultural presence in this region. It is also a wake-up call sounded by one of the most prominent religious and national voices in contemporary Iraq: His Beatitude Patriarch Louis Raphael Sako. Over the past decades, Patriarch Sako has been widely recognized for his intellectual candor, his unwavering defense of the civil state and the values of citizenship, religious and cultural pluralism, and the right of all Iraqis to coexist within a state that protects them on an equal footing.

The significance of this speech lies in the fact that it does not treat Christians as an isolated religious group or as an exclusive issue affecting followers of a particular faith; instead, it raises a fundamental question about the future of the Middle East itself. Eastern Christians are not immigrants or newcomers to the region; they are part of its deep historical fabric. For centuries, they have contributed to the building of its languages, cultures, cities, and its educational, scientific, and religious institutions. Consequently, the decline of their presence or the continuous hemorrhage of their migration does not represent a loss for one specific group alone, but a profound loss for the societies in which they were raised and for the diversity that has constituted one of the most vital elements of its richness.

Like several Middle Eastern nations, Iraq has historically known various forms of coexistence and interaction among its diverse religious, ethnic, and cultural components. This diversity was never a mere demographic fact; it was a source of societal strength, vitality, and the capacity to generate a rich, multi-faceted culture. However, recent decades have witnessed a progressive erosion of this heritage as a result of wars, conflicts, sectarian violence, the rise of armed groups, and the decline of state authority and the rule of law. These factors, compounded by economic and social crises, have driven large numbers of citizens, including Christians, to seek a more secure future outside their homelands.

Hence, Patriarch Sako's arguments should not be read solely as a defensive discourse for a threatened community, but as an invitation to a deeper examination of the crises of the state, citizenship, and coexistence in the region. The issue, as he clearly points out, is not

an inescapable historical or religious destiny; rather, it is the product of rectifiable political choices, weak institutions, the retreat of the rule of law, and the occasional inability of the state to provide equal protection to all its citizens.

Delivered before the Annual Coptic Conference in Washington, this speech arrives at a highly sensitive regional and international juncture, amid growing fears over the sustained hemorrhage of migration and the decline of the historic Christian presence in the Middle East. In this sense, it is not merely a diagnosis of the problem, but an ethical, political, and cultural appeal calling for action to protect diversity as a shared human value, and to build modern states founded upon equal citizenship, justice, and respect for human dignity.

Below is the full text of the speech by His Beatitude Patriarch Louis Raphael Sako, as delivered in his video address to the Annual Coptic Conference held in Washington on June 9, 2026, addressing the challenges threatening the survival of Christians in the Middle East.

Challenges Threatening the Survival of Christians in the Middle East

I would first like to express my sincere gratitude to the conference coordinator, Mr. Magdi Khalil, for his enduring concern for Middle Eastern Christians and for his dedicated tracking of their troubling situation through his writings, statements, and the organization of this vital annual forum. I am pleased to submit my contribution to this gathering in the form of a recorded video message.

The Historical Context and Present Danger

Christians in the Middle East are the indigenous inhabitants of the region, predating the arrival of Muslim forces from the Arabian Peninsula. Historically, the majority population across Mesopotamia (modern-day Iraq), as well as Syria, Lebanon, Egypt, and Palestine, was Christian.

Today, however, Christians face the very real threat of extinction due to the rise of sectarian regimes, rampant militias, escalating violence, armed conflicts, and protracted wars. For example, prior to the fall of the former regime, Christians comprised approximately 4% of the Iraqi population; today, they constitute perhaps less than 1%. Similarly, in Syria, Christians once accounted for around 20% of the population, but today that figure has plummeted close to 1%. This alarming trend is mirrored across the region.

The First Core Catalyst: The Absence of the Civil State

Societies in the Middle East remain far from adopting a genuine civil state system—one that unites all individuals under the banner of inclusive citizenship. Most regional regimes declare Islam as the official state religion, a designation frequently exploited as a cover to

achieve narrow political and material objectives. This instrumentalization distorts the faith itself and severely undermines peaceful coexistence.

When religion or sectarian affiliation shifts from a free, faith-based relationship with God and the ethical treatment of others into a politicized ideology, it inevitably transforms into an arena for political and sectarian conflict. Consequently, governments become fundamentally incapable of protecting the basic rights, liberties, and property of Christians and other minority communities.

Furthermore, religiously and sect-driven violence remains deeply embedded in contemporary political and religious discourse. We have witnessed deeply troubling rhetoric during recent conflicts, with bizarre assertions claiming, for instance, that “We won because we offered martyrs!”

The Second Core Catalyst: Extremism and Outdated Discourse

The widespread proliferation of ignorance and illiteracy has created a fertile breeding ground for extremist groups. These radical factions operate with fundamentalist ideologies aimed at establishing a religious state governed strictly by Sharia law. In doing so, they fail to recognize that human paradigms have shifted; contemporary attitudes, cultures, and languages have evolved profoundly. Fresh global values and complex societal issues have emerged that traditional, rigid religious discourse is entirely unequipped to address.

By contrast, Western nations, such as the United States, Canada, Australia, and European states, rely fundamentally on secular, civil frameworks. As a result, these societies thrive within diversity, anchoring social relations in justice and equality rather than exclusion or the forced imposition of beliefs. Western governments actively strive to provide a dignified life for all citizens equally, including Muslim immigrants, operating on the foundational belief that diversity is a vital source of national strength rather than a problem to be solved.

A Framework for Solutions

In light of these existential and frightening challenges, I propose the following strategic measures:

Internal Reform and Sovereign Governance: The region requires a realistic, clear-eyed assessment of the current crisis, followed by an immediate commitment to internal systemic reform. A definitive political framework must be established to build national civil states. It is entirely unacceptable to tolerate a “state within a state.” Widespread corruption must be confronted decisively and without favoritism, and stolen state funds must be firmly recovered. This overhaul necessitates modern legislation and the systematic reform of outdated, inherited laws that no longer align with contemporary realities.

A Project for Equal Citizenship: All citizens, including Christians, require a just, lasting peace, robust security, viable employment opportunities, reliable public services, and fundamental freedoms, a human life lived with dignity and happiness. This can only be achieved through a modern state project where all individuals enjoy equal rights and unite under a single, overarching national identity.

The Separation of Faith and Public Administration: Religion must be treated as a private, personal matter; every individual must possess the absolute freedom to believe or not to believe. Conversely, public affairs and governance should depend strictly on competence and capability. All citizens are equal; Christians are no less capable or loyal to their homelands than any other group, and all citizens must be entitled to full freedom of religious expression.

Christian Unity and Resilience: Christians must remain rooted in their ancestral lands, preserving their national, cultural, and religious heritage. They must unify their discourse and collective positions when demanding security, reassurance, justice, and equality, rather than viewing themselves merely as a vulnerable religious minority. Preservation lies in unity, mutual advocacy, and communal support. This collective approach will help them maintain hope, secure a safe environment, develop their native regions, and generate essential economic opportunities.

International Accountability: The West must support Christians as indigenous, equal citizens of their respective nations. This should be achieved by strictly conditioning international relations on respect for human rights and adherence to international law, which mandates the protection of religious and ethnic diversity and guarantees freedom of expression. The international community must ensure that these historic lands are not progressively emptied of Eastern Christians, who represent the very roots of early Christianity.

Conclusion

We dream of a safe, stable homeland that embraces fundamental freedoms, inclusive citizenship, justice, and equality. We are the rightful people of this land, not migrants who arrived from foreign shores.

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Thank you

