

*AMERICAN BAPTIST CHURCHES USA*

*Rev. Dr. A. Roy Medley  
General Secretary Emeritus*

**February 22, 2016**

**TO: BGM Executive Committee**

**FROM: Roy Medley**

**RE: A Word to the Executive Committee about the Marrakesh Declaration**

Dear friends and beloved in Christ,

The Marrakesh Conference that has led to the Marrakesh Declaration was, I believe, a watershed moment in the Muslim world. For the first time, leading religious and political leaders from Muslim-majority countries around the world, gathered to propose a document rooted in Islamic experience and teaching that will serve as a foundation for the constitutional rights of people of all faiths in those countries. This is an amazing milestone that builds upon the foundation of the Common Word document that invited our two faith communities to seek peace and understanding with one another.

Like the Common Word, this was an initiative by the Muslim community to build bridges of peace. It was preceded by 4 years of careful engagement by key leaders, including our dialogue partner ISNA (who had several representatives present), to create the atmosphere in which this conference could succeed. One has to remember that this effort was being undertaken at the very time that ISIS/ISIL/DASH has been extending its reign of terror against Christians and Shia Muslims throughout the Middle East and through collaborators across North Africa as well. Thus, it proved to be an opportunity for a counter-voice to be raised - a Muslim counter voice that speaks of the rights of all to live in freedom and security whatever their religious faith or lack of faith.

This is an incredible milestone in the path towards religious liberty in Muslim-majority countries.

Before the event and declaration Muslim scholars and experts in jurisprudence were preparing the scholarly research to ground this declaration firmly in Islamic sources - a key to its acceptance by Muslims around the world. In so doing, they have rooted it not only in portions of the Koran such as the statement that there shall be no compulsion in religion but also in the practice of Mohammed in Medina. When arriving in Medina, Mohammed was asked to mediate a conflict between warring tribes. In so doing he established the Charter (or Constitution) of Medina which guaranteed the Jewish tribes there full rights and protections as citizens. The Marrakesh Declaration cites this document as the foundation for the rights of people of all faiths in Muslim-majority countries. In so doing they also declare their commitment to the UN Declaration on Human Rights which guarantees full religious freedom for all as consistent with Islamic law and practice.

To those who would detract from this conference by implying that no hard issues were raised and discussed, I would counter that I had complete freedom along with others to voice concerns. While there, I was able to address the harmful effects of blasphemy and apostasy laws on the Christian church in Muslim-majority countries. Christian representatives from the Middle East also spoke freely of their struggles, and I would also note that more than once, Muslim leaders spoke of what a tragedy it would be if there were no longer a presence of the church in the Middle East. The plight of the church in the Middle East was forthrightly raised and discussed as one of the key issues that had to be addressed.

Our presence as American Baptists at this event is noteworthy in that we were one of only 50 non-Muslim leaders invited to attend as delegates. Our invitation shows the signal place and trust held by American Baptists among Muslims who struggle for religious liberty for all. More than once, it has been mentioned that we have spoken for the rights of Muslims not only in the US, but also in Burma, the Republic of Georgia and other places. And as Jesus teaches, "To whom much is given, much is required."

Our reputation requires us now to continue this journey that we have begun with Muslims who seek peace and justice for all. One expression of that will be a third national dialogue in the US that will engage younger Baptist and Muslim leaders in efforts to bring their churches and mosques together for mutual peacemaking and work for the common good in their communities.

Another will be the continuing engagement of American Baptists as a voice for religious liberty for all persons in solidarity with these courageous Muslim leaders. The declaration holds much promise, but it is a budding promise that will not flower into constitutional guarantees in Muslim countries without consistent and persistent effort by all who share a commitment to the precious right of each person to make decisions regarding faith free from the coercion of the state. We have begun a remarkable journey and it is important that we continue to steadfastly walk this journey of peace knowing full well like Pilgrim in Pilgrim's Progress that the journey will not be without struggle and setbacks. And like Pilgrim, we, too, must trust that this journey is in God's hands whatever outward circumstances may seem. We sing, "We've come this far by faith, leaning on the Lord," and so we live.

In late March, I will travel with a small US delegation to Cairo, Egypt for a second round of conversations about US-Egyptian relations. Again, I shall be your ambassador in this setting. I go with a troubled heart because of the increased restrictions upon civil liberties by the Morsi government. In the first visit, both civil and religious leaders present from Egypt spoke of the grave threat that the Muslim Brotherhood had been to freedom and religious pluralism in Egypt and the importance of the Morsi government to be supported. Yet, now, the press reports a decrease in freedoms as the Morsi government cracks down on supporters for democracy in Egypt. So, I ask your prayers for wisdom as I listen and dialogue with government, religious and civil society leaders in a country that has long been key to peace in that region.

May you know the blessing of Christ upon your meetings as you set plans in place for June and our continued dialogue as American Baptists on issues of race in our life as a church and as a nation.

In Christ,



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American Baptist Churches USA