

## **Christians in Middle East. What future?**

The Christians in the wider area of Middle East and from North Africa live in critical times. The prevalence of extreme fundamentalist elements of other religions in the area puts in an immediate danger the staying of Christians in their ancient homelands. Daily, Christian worship places are being destroyed, the Christian properties are being assaulted and the elementary Human Rights and Religious Freedom are violated. Thereby Christians are forced to leave their country. Already thousands of Christians have abandoned their ancient birthplaces and they have already become refugees in many parts of the world.

Christian population, with different doctrines, from Egypt to Siria and from Lebanon to Iraq, in 1948 numbered approx. 20% of the entire population. Today, because of the continuous violent acts, the tensions and the hostilities, the religious fanaticism and the religious discrimination in the Middle East area and in North Africa, their number is now estimated at around 6%. Unfortunately, this number continues to fall.

Within the general interest of the Church of Cyprus for the above situation, H.B. the Archbishop of Cyprus Chrysostomos, participates at the International Conference entitled: "Christians in Middle East: What Future?", organized by the community of Sant'Egidio from 29 until 30 of April 2015, in Bari, Italy. The aim of this Conference is to highlight the tragic situation of the Christians in Middle East. At the Conference participated Heads and Representatives of Churches, Foreign Ministers and various other personalities.

H.B. the Archbishop of Cyprus Crysostomos in his Greeting stressed the need to focus our attention on the sensitive area of Middle East. Religious and Political leaders have to listen to the peoples' messages for Religious Freedom and respect for Human Rights. It is necessary that they stand strongly against regimes, that in their agony of survival, they scatter death, violence and terror to the peoples and they destroy every memory of historic and religious presence of Christians in the Middle East area.