

Muslim-Christian call: “Let us face the reality of migration together”

The latest tragic shipwreck of a migrants boat in the Mediterranean Sea calls everyone to take responsibility. Because of its complexity, the migratory phenomenon needs solutions of various kinds, taking into account the political, social, economic and environmental factors of the countries involved. But it is first and foremost a human fact that challenges everyone’s conscience.

Christians and Muslims can feel particularly affected by this reality. Indeed, the majority of migrants trying to reach Europe are people of Christian or Muslim faith, the territories through which they transit have a significant Christian or Muslim presence, and the places from which they embark are mostly countries with a Muslim majority.

In recent years, Muslim-Christian dialogue has understandably focused on issues like peaceful coexistence, equal citizenship, and religious violence, resulting in the publication of joint declarations, public statements and international conferences. We believe that migration, with all the suffering that goes with it, deserves similar attention. There are already many initiatives taken in this field by either individuals or institutions, but a joint action would help enhance Muslim-Christian friendship.

It is not the immediate task of religious authorities and the Christian and Muslim faithful to suggest technical solutions to the challenges that migration entails. They can, however, intervene on both a humanitarian and a cultural level, contributing to the debate on this issue in the light of the values enshrined in their respective traditions. As stated in the Document on Human Fraternity for World Peace and Living Together, signed by Pope Francis and the Grand Imam of al-Azhar Ahmad al-Tayyib on 4 February 2019, “Faith leads a believer to see in the other a brother or sister to be supported and loved. Through faith in God, who has created the universe, creatures and all human beings (equal on account of his mercy), believers are called to express this human fraternity by safeguarding creation and the entire universe and supporting all persons, especially the poorest and those most in need.”

In the encyclical *Fratelli Tutti*, moreover, Pope Francis pointed out that migration is always an experience of uprooting, and therefore he reaffirmed “the right not to emigrate, that is, to remain in one’s homeland.” At the same time, however, he recalled that “many migrants have fled from war, persecution and natural catastrophes” while “others, rightly, are seeking opportunities for themselves and their families. They dream of a better future and they want to create the conditions for achieving it.”

As it unfolds, migration consists of several stages and involves a plurality of actors. To govern it, action must be taken at every level, upstream and downstream at the same time: working to try to remove the causes that generate it, thus limiting its scope, and at the same time providing safe routes and adequate forms of reception and integration for people who decide to leave their country.

Christians and Muslims are called upon to make their contribution in each of these areas, committing themselves against the injustices and oppression that are often at the root of the decision to leave, opposing the nationalistic and selfish closures that prevent reception, and condemning the unscrupulous actions of human traffickers and smugglers who make money by putting the lives of migrants at risk.

The call for an Islamic-Christian mobilization around these issues is in no way intended to exclude or deny the contribution of people of other religious traditions and convictions, but aims to ensure that a spiritual and moral heritage partly shared between Christians and Muslims is put at the service of the good life of all.