



May 7, 2012

His Excellency Prime Minister Tayyip Erdoğan

As-Salamu Alaykum

Your Excellency,

In The Name Of Allah, The Most Beneficent, The Most Merciful.

We come to you today as a special delegation of Muslims from many countries and backgrounds to make a heartfelt appeal to you to allow us the privilege of a brief audience with your Excellency at any time such a meeting may be possible.

As Muslims, we honor our faith's tradition of mutual respect toward all believers including Jews and Christians. Today, we have an obligation and a unique opportunity to apply the inclusive spirit of Islam through an important international gesture.

Worldwide, there are many today who, in the name of Islam, have tarnished the true character of our faith by acts of self-serving violence committed in its name. The consequence has been a world filled with hate, mistrust, and people who fear us and believe that Muslims act only to destroy. This has resulted in an increasing tide of Islamophobia, particularly in the Western countries. We appeal to you today to consider a positive gesture, which we believe will counter and help dissolve this negativity.

In 1971, the government of Turkey closed the Christian Orthodox Seminary Halki on the island of Heybeliada. The closure occurred during a government crack-down on Islamic as well as Christian religious educational institutions. As Muslims, we believe that reopening the school at Halki would be a uniquely important gesture. Not only will it earn international praise for the government of Turkey, but it will also demonstrate the mutual respect and love that Muslims worldwide have historically displayed towards Jews and Christians, People of the Book. It will significantly mitigate the malevolent actions of those who distort the image of Islam and create hatred towards the Ummah. Finally, such an act would be true to the traditions of magnanimity and mutual respect exemplified by Umar Ibn al-Khattab (Allah be pleased with him) and the best traditions of Turkey, particularly of the great Mehmet II Ghazi, and the refuge provided by the Ottoman Empire to Andalusian Jews during the Spanish inquisition of 1492.

As Muslims who follow the teachings of *The Qur'an* and the traditions of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH), we bring to your attention a few relevant ayahs from *The Qur'an*, and also attach for you the covenant established by the Prophet in 628 in his dealings with Christians, which addresses in very clear language the rights of the Christians as a minority in a Muslim state. This charter is prominently displayed in the main museum in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia.

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*The Qur'an* says, "Those who have been driven from their homes unjustly only because they said: Our sustainer is God – For, if God had not enabled people to defend themselves against one another, (all) monasteries and churches and synagogues and mosques, in (all of) which

God's name is abundantly extolled, would surely have been destroyed" (22:40). This revelation was received after the Muslims in Mecca were denied access to the Kabah and were exiled by the pagan Quraysh of Mecca. The principle emanating from this revelation is that all houses of worship built for pious use - Jewish, Christian, Muslim - are to be protected.

Islam is a religion of peace, love, and mutual respect. Today, however, some circles have been presenting a false image of Islam, as if there was a conflict between Islam and the adherents of the two other monotheistic religions. Yet, Islam's view of Jews and Christians, who are named "the People of the Book" in *The Qur'an*, is very friendly and most respectful.

We fondly recall the time when Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) directed the Muslims in Makkah to take refuge with King Negus, the Christian king of Ethiopia. The Muslims who followed this advice found a very fair administration that embraced them with love and respect when they went to Ethiopia. King Negus refused the demands of the pagan Makkan leaders who asked him to surrender the Muslims to them, and announced that Muslims could live freely in his country.

As God points out in *The Qur'an*, the attitudes of Christian people are based on the concepts of compassion, mercy, modesty and justice. A verse of *The Qur'an* states:

“... You will find the people most affectionate to those who say, 'We are Christians.' That is because some of them are priests and monks and because they are not arrogant.” (5:82)

Islam accords special status to Judaism and Christianity, categorically calling their adherents, “Ahl al-Kitab” (People of the Book). It identifies itself with the People of the Book as the “Abrahamic family” within the Semitic Tradition (Hanifiyyah), the tradition of Abraham who is recognized as the father of the three Semitic religions. Each of these religions has its book; that is, they are subject to a revelation sent down by God. They know what is right and what is wrong, what is lawful and what is unlawful. They love and revere God's prophets, and they know that they are ultimately accountable to God. This shows that Muslims and the People of the Book share a divine legacy, a historical tradition of mutual co-existence, and a spirit of kinship and togetherness.

A shining example of this magnanimity was demonstrated by Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) in Makkah in January 630 AD, when he led a strong army of 10,000 men and conquered Makkah, from where he had been exiled, and where the Quraysh had persecuted and embargoed him and his small cadre of followers for 13 years, and had even tried to kill him. After the conquest of Makkah, the Prophet gave complete amnesty to all; there was no bloodshed, no coercion. He initiated reconciliation with the very people who had tried to kill him. This loftiness of spirit, dignity, and outreach has become a model for all to follow.

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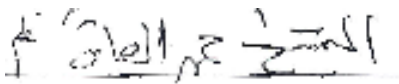
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We appeal to Your Excellency to allow the reopening of the Christian Orthodox Seminary Halki on the island of Heybeliada, and to facilitate the unfettered access of the Christian community to this seminary. We will be honored to present this letter to you in person at a time that is convenient to you.

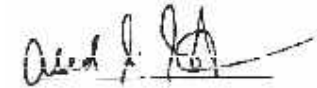
With our best wishes,



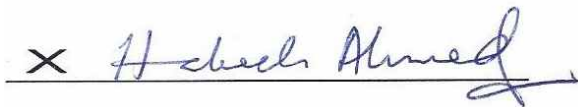
Syed Agha Jafri  
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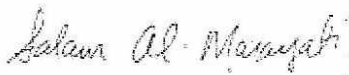
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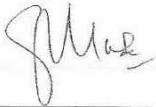
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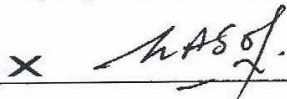
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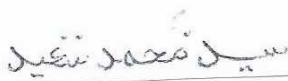
**Muzammil Siddiqui**

Chair, Fiqh Council of North America; California, USA.



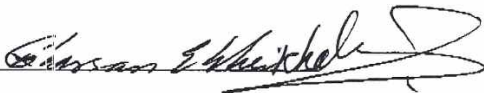
**Mohammad Abdullah Sofi**

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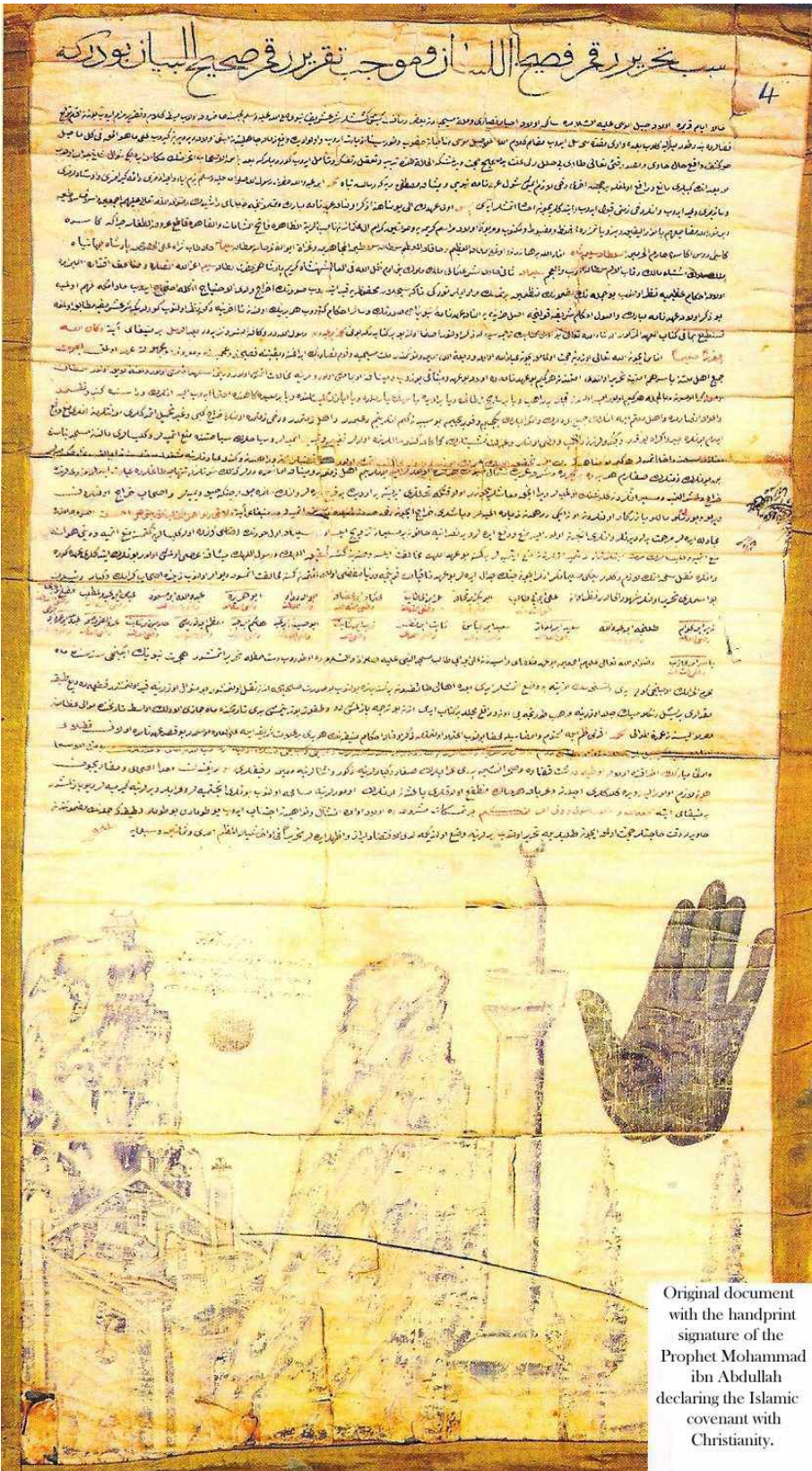
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Original document with the handprint signature of the Prophet Muhammad ibn Abdullah declaring the Islamic covenant with Christianity.

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# Prophet Muhammad's Charter of Privileges to Christians

(Letter to the Monks of St. Catherine Monastery)

In 628 C.E., Prophet Muhammad (s) granted a Charter of Privileges to the monks of St. Catherine Monastery in Mt. Sinai. It consisted of several clauses covering all aspects of human rights including such topics as the protection of Christians, freedom of worship and movement, freedom to appoint their own judges and to own and maintain their property, exemption from military service, and the right to protection in war.

An English translation (of the document presented on the back cover of this book):

**This is a message from Muhammad ibn Abdullah, as a covenant to those who adopt Christianity, near and far, we are with them.**

**Verily I, the servants, the helpers, and my followers defend them, because**

**Christians are my citizens; and by Allah! I hold out against anything that displeases them.**

**No compulsion is to be on them.**

**Neither are their judges to be removed from their jobs nor their monks from their monasteries.**

**No one is to destroy a house of their religion, to damage it, or to carry anything from it to the Muslims' houses.**

**Should anyone take any of these, he would spoil God's covenant and disobey His Prophet. Verily, they are my allies and have my secure charter against all that they hate.**

**No one is to force them to travel or to oblige them to fight.**

**The Muslims are to fight for them.**

**If a female Christian is married to a Muslim, it is not to take place without her approval. She is not to be prevented from visiting her church to pray.**

**Their churches are to be respected. They are neither to be prevented from repairing them nor the sacredness of their covenants.**

**No one of the nation (Muslims) is to disobey the covenant till the Last Day (end of the world).**

This charter of privileges has been honoured and faithfully applied by Muslims throughout the centuries in all lands they ruled.

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