



The Future of Christians in Syria

Brussels, 8 September 2026

On 8 September 2026, a high-level conference was held at the European Parliament in Brussels to address the critical situation and future of Christian communities in Syria. Two prominent figures in international diplomacy opened the event: H.E. Mairead McGuinness, EU Special Envoy for the promotion of freedom of religion, and the Hon. Nadine Maenza, Co-Chair of the International Religious Freedom Roundtable – IRF. Bringing together distinguished religious leaders and political representatives, the panelists reached a broad consensus on the steps needed towards an inclusive and democratic Syria.

The various speakers expressed a shared concern regarding the future of Christians and other historically rooted communities in Syria. All panelists stressed that long-term security cannot be achieved through temporary protection or symbolic representation alone. Such security requires equal citizenship, meaningful political participation, and rights guaranteed by the constitution and the law.

Christian communities continue to face emigration, insecurity, and a decline in their participation in political and institutional life. Similar concerns affect other religious and ethnic communities across Syria. The panelists unanimously underlined the importance of preserving Syria's religious, cultural, ethnic, and linguistic diversity as an essential element of the country's future.

Religious freedom must go beyond the mere protection of places of worship. All speakers agreed that it must include security, freedom of belief, the protection of property and heritage, equal access to public life, and the opportunity for all Syrians to participate in shaping the country's political future. Accountability for violence and violations is also necessary in order to restore trust and strengthen the rule of law.

The discussions highlighted the need for a constitution and political system that guarantee equality before the law, judicial independence, non-discrimination, and meaningful participation in public institutions. Representation must be genuine and inclusive rather than symbolic.

Looking to the future, all panelists stressed the importance of dialogue and cooperation with all relevant actors, including the transitional government, political and community representatives, civil society, religious leaders, and international partners. The objective should be to identify areas of common ground and support an inclusive political transition in which all communities can contribute to rebuilding the country.

The European Union and other international partners can play an important role by encouraging inclusive dialogue, supporting transparent and accountable institutions, and ensuring that the voices of Syrians from different communities are heard in decisions concerning the country's future.

The ultimate goal should be a pluralistic, democratic, and stable Syria based on equal citizenship, participation, and partnership — a country in which all Syrians can remain, contribute, and build their future together.

- **Panel 1: Religious Freedom**

Moderated by Thibault van den Bossche, ECLJ:

- Johannes de Jong, Sallux
- Archbishop Georges Masri, Greek Melkite Metropolitan Archbishop of Aleppo
- Bishop Georges Assadourian, Armenian Catholic Bishop of Damascus
- Fr. Vasilios Khamis, Greek Orthodox Church of Antioch

- **Panel 2: Political Representation**

Moderated by Metin Rhawi, ESU:

- Sanharib Barsom, Syriac Union Party
- Waddah Al Khoury, Levantine National Council
- Petrus Homi, Assyrian Democratic Party
- Sarah Aphram, Syriac Cross Belgium
- **Co-organising Committee:**
 - Ms Ruth Daskalopoulou, Coordinator, Director of International Relations and Special Envoy for Interreligious Dialogue, RIC srl
 - Mr Metin Rhawi, Head of Foreign Affairs, European Syriac Union (ESU)
 - Mr Thibault van den Bossche, Religious Freedom Advocacy Officer, European Centre for Law and Justice (ECLJ)
 - Mr Johannes de Jong, Director of Sallux
 - Ms Sarah Aphram, Head of Syriac Cross Belgium
 - Mr Peter Bronsveld, Director of Jubilee Campaign

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