



# **Discrimination, Persecution, Martyrdom: Following Christ Together**

Report of the international consultation  
*Tirana, Albania, 2-4 November 2015*

*Because so much of the Christianity  
of yesterday and of today  
is the history of martyrdom,  
each of us and each community  
must gather in a glass cup  
the tears and blood of the persecuted,  
preventing it from being lost  
or trampled into the ground.*

*Andrea Riccardi, Tirana, 2 November 2015*

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The Pentecostal World Fellowship

The World Council of Churches

The World Evangelical Alliance

*Hosted by the*

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The Orthodox Autocephalous Church of Albania

The Albania Catholic Bishops Conference

The Evangelical Alliance of Albania

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*Tirana, Albania*  
*2-4 November 2015*

*Edited by Huibert van Beek and Larry Miller*

*Introduction by Larry Miller*

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Heads, hearts, and hands contributed also to the creation of this report: Huibert van Beek, who did the tedious but foundational work of collecting and transcribing the consultation proceedings; Bruce Barron and Eleanor Miller, who endured the minutiae of English-language copy-editing; Kim Cain, unusually-gifted photographer; Jesse Cain, the designer who adds beauty to content; and the Gebende Hände Foundation (Germany), which has under-written financially and over-seen administratively the publication of this book. To each of these, we express our strong gratitude.

Larry Miller

Global Christian Forum Secretary  
Strasbourg, 4 March 2018



hosted the conference, for which the Resurrection of Christ Orthodox Cathedral and Cultural Centre was the primary venue.

It was possibly the first time in the modern history of the church that a gathering consisting of so many streams of global Christianity coalesced around the issue of persecution of Christians. It may have been the first time also that high-level leaders from the widest spectrum of churches acknowledged collectively complicity in discrimination and persecution not only of people of other faiths but also of each other.

This book contains the Consultation proceedings, including the messages and the list of participants. This introduction provides essential context for understanding the proceedings as it describes the sequence of the programme and the spirituality of the event.

### *The Flow of the Consultation*

The consultation programme (see pages xi - xv) was designed in three successive stages, to allow for a pertinent flow of the meeting process from the beginning to the end. The themes for the three days of sessions were (1) Listening to Suffering Churches, (2) Living in Solidarity with Suffering Churches, and (3) Walking Together as the Suffering Church.

On each of the first two days, three plenary sessions were held in the morning and afternoon, with a small-group discussion session in the late afternoon. The evenings were left open for optional meetings and interaction between participants or participating bodies. On the last day, two more plenary sessions took place, along with one session in which the participants of the four global constituencies engaged in the consultation met separately.

The consultation opened with words of welcome from three Albanian church leaders: H.B. Archbishop Anastasios (Orthodox), Bishop George A. Frendo (Catholic), and the Rev. Akil Pano (Evangelical). Rev Dr Larry Miller, Secretary of the Global Christian Forum, also offered introductory remarks. Representatives of the four global bodies expressed their hopes for the consultation; Catholic Kurt Cardinal Koch read a message of greeting from Pope Francis. Dr Andrea Riccardi, founder of the Community of Sant'Egidio, then delivered a keynote address on the theme of the consultation.





The programme was enriched by two informal sessions, on the second and third days, about the situation of the churches in Iran, northern Iraq and Syria. It was further enhanced by the reception for all consultation participants hosted the final evening in the Presidential Palace by the President of the Republic of Albania, His Excellency, Mr Bujar Hishani.

Most of the consultation presentations were in English, with some in Italian, Spanish, or Arabic, which have been translated into English here. At the consultation, simultaneous interpretation was provided (into English, French, Italian, Spanish, Russian) to assist all participants in understanding.

### *A Spirit of Prayer*

The consultation was heavily embedded in prayer. On the Sunday before the consultation, participants attended the Divine Liturgy celebrated in the Resurrection of Christ Cathedral of the Orthodox Autocephalous Church of Albania. Each meeting day began with a morning prayer time lasting about an hour. On the first and second day, evening prayers were held in the intimate setting of the small groups, which facilitated sharing the richness of the diverse spiritual streams present in the meeting.

As a vivid expression of the three Albanian Christian traditions involved in the preparation and implementation of the consultation, the morning prayers were held respectively in the Orthodox Cathedral, the Albania Christian Centre of the Evangelical Alliance, and St. Paul's Catholic Cathedral, with the host congregation leading the service according to its tradition and providing the preached message. The three speakers, respectively, were H.E. Metropolitan Vasilios of the Church of Cyprus; Pastor Barry Ogden, International Protestant Assembly, Tirana; and Msgr George Frenco, Auxiliary Bishop of Tirana-Durres.

Prayer was also at the heart of the programme in the daily sessions. Each plenary began with a reading from the scriptures in several languages, a time of silence, and the singing of a hymn, according to the tradition of the Taizé community. These moments were animated by



## *The Content of the Messages*

The messages contained in this book vary considerably in style and content. Some are highly personal and expressed with deep emotion, others more theological. Some describe circumstances that have changed considerably since November 2015. Every message or exchange is important. To facilitate readings, following are some key themes of the consultation and where they appear most prominently.

- One of the most encouraging undertones of the conference involved hearing “what God has done” in Albania, which was an officially atheist state just a quarter-century before we convened in Tirana. The welcoming messages from our Albanian hosts in session 1, the keynote by Dr Riccardi at the same session, and the greeting from Catholic Archbishop Massafra at the beginning of session 3 contain brief but powerful reflections on this transformation.
- Session 1 also features substantive remarks from leaders of the four global bodies and deeply provocative reflections on the meaning of Christian witness and martyrdom today by Dr Riccardi.
- Sessions 2 and 3 contain extensively documented and often heart-wrenching details on the recent experiences of Christians in Myanmar, India, Pakistan, Kenya, Nigeria, Algeria, Syria, Iran, Iraq, Palestine, and elsewhere.
- The urgent need for a unified stance and collaboration among Christian bodies arose repeatedly, such as in open discussions in session 2 regarding Algeria and Kenya; the presentation by an evangelical from the Holy Land in session 3, with a reprise during open discussion in session 6; and a comment from a Bolivian evangelical in session 5.
- The most extensive biblical and theological discussion of the “martyric” church and the nature of self-sacrificial but transforming obedience to Christ was provided by His Beatitude Archbishop Anastasios at the beginning of session 5. His principled, practical articulation of what God expects of



solidarity could turn out to be empty without substantive action, urging those bodies that have seats at high places like the United Nations to exercise their influence.

- The best place to find a comprehensive overview of the leading issues and concerns shared by conference participants is the chapter summarizing the outcomes of the small-group discussions. Many frank, perceptive insights are contained therein.

### *What has Happened Since Tirana?*

In the consultation message, participants committed themselves to listen more, pray more, speak up more, do more. They called on all Christians to include more prominently in daily prayers those who are discriminated against, persecuted, and suffering for following Christ daily. They called on all Christian organisations on regional, national and local levels from various traditions to learn, pray and work together in their localities for the persecuted, to ensure that they are better supported. They called on all churches to engage in more dialogue and cooperation with other faith communities.

Have we kept our commitments? Have we pursued the calls? For some of us, the answer may lead more appropriately to confession than to confidence.

What is not in doubt is the continuing need to listen more, pray more, speak up more, do more. Because what is not at all in doubt is that discrimination, persecution, and martyrdom of Christians—and of some other people of faith—continue unabated. Since the Tirana consultation, following Christ together has become no less costly—and no less the call of Christ on all Christians and on all churches.

# Programme

*Monday, 2 November*

*Listening to Suffering Churches*

09.00 – 10.00	<b>Morning Prayer</b> Resurrection of Christ Orthodox Cathedral of Tirana Orthodox Autocephalous Church of Albania
10.30 – 11.00	<i>Morning Tea and Coffee</i>
11.00 – 12.30	<b>Session 1 — Opening Plenary</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Welcome from the Albanian churches</li><li>• Introduction to the consultation</li><li>• Hopes for the consultation</li><li>• Keynote presentation: Discrimination, Persecution, and Martyrdom in the 21st Century</li></ul>
12.30 – 14.00	<i>Lunch and networking</i>
14.00 – 15.30	<b>Session 2 — Plenary</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Voices and Data Research: Introduction</li><li>• Panel: Following Christ Together in Discrimination, Persecution, Martyrdom — Voices from Suffering Churches (I)</li><li>• Conversation with the panel and one another</li></ul>
15.30 – 16.00	<i>Afternoon Tea and Coffee</i>
16.00 – 17.30	<b>Session 3 — Plenary</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Panel: Following Christ Together in Discrimination, Persecution, Martyrdom — Voices from Suffering Churches (II)</li><li>• Conversation with the panel and one another</li></ul>
17.30 – 17.45	<i>Brief Break</i>
17.45 – 19.15	<b>Session 4 — Small Groups</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Learning to know one another: telling personal and ecclesial stories related to the theme</li><li>• Discerning together: responding to the presentations and panels</li><li>• Praying together: evening prayers</li></ul>
19.30 – 21.00	<i>Dinner and networking</i>
21.00 – 22.00	Optional evening meetings: stories, reports, information by consultation participants

*Tuesday, 3 November*

*Living in Solidarity with Suffering Churches*

09.00 – 10.00	<b>Morning Prayer</b> Albania Christian Centre Evangelical Alliance of Albania
10.30 – 11.00	<i>Morning Tea and Coffee</i>
11.00 – 12.30	<b>Session 5 — Plenary</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Keynote presentation: Biblical and Theological Perspectives</li><li>• Keynote presentation: Human Rights and Religious Liberty Perspectives</li><li>• First Consideration of a ‘Consultation Message’</li></ul>
12.30 – 14.00	<i>Lunch and networking</i>
14.00 – 15.30	<b>Session 6 — Plenary</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Reflection on Language Research: Introduction</li><li>• Panel: Following Christ Together in Discrimination, Persecution, Martyrdom — Voices from Churches in Solidarity</li><li>• Conversation with the panel and one another</li></ul>
15.30 – 16.00	<i>Afternoon Tea and Coffee</i>
16.00 – 17.30	<b>Session 7 — Plenary</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Panel: Following Christ Together in Discrimination, Persecution, Martyrdom — Voices from Agencies in Solidarity</li><li>• Conversation with the panel and one another</li></ul>
17.30 – 17.45	<i>Brief Break</i>
17.45 – 19.15	<b>Session 8 — Small Groups</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Discerning together:<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Responding to the presentations and panels</li><li>- Considering a ‘Consultation Message’</li></ul></li><li>• Praying together: evening prayers</li></ul>
19.30 – 21.00	<i>Dinner and networking</i>
21.00 – 22.00	Optional evening meetings: stories, reports, information by consultation participants



*Wednesday, 4 November*

*Walking Together as Suffering Church*

09.00 – 10.00	<b>Morning Prayer</b> St. Paul's Cathedral Catholic Church in Albania
10.30 – 11.00	<i>Morning Tea and Coffee</i>
11.00 – 12.30	<b>Session 9 — Plenary</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Panel: Visions of 'Walking Together as Suffering Church: Next Steps'</li><li>• Second Consideration of a 'Consultation Message'</li></ul>
12.30 – 14.00	<i>Lunch and networking</i>
14.00 – 15.30	<b>Session 10 — Confessional Groups</b> (Catholic, Ecumenical, Evangelical, Pentecostal) <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Discerning together: next steps for ourselves and with others</li></ul>
15.30 – 16.00	<i>Afternoon Tea and Coffee</i>
16.00 – 17.30	<b>Session 11 — Plenary</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Panel: Next Steps Walking Together as Suffering Church – Leaders of the Catholic Church, PWF, WCC, WEA, GCF and suffering churches</li><li>• Conversation with the panel and one another</li><li>• Third Consideration of a 'Consultation Message'</li></ul>
17.30 – 17.45	<i>Brief Break</i>
17.45 – 19.15	<b>Session 12 — Closing Prayer</b>
19.30 – 21.00	<i>Reception held by the President of Albania</i>

### *Theme and Goals of the Consultation*

- (1) Provide opportunity for exchange in a safe space among leaders of churches suffering discrimination, persecution, and even martyrdom
- (2) Better listen to, learn from, and accompany churches suffering discrimination, persecution, and martyrdom
- (3) Inform one another of our activities in solidarity with churches in these situations
- (4) Seek a common understanding of the facts of the situations of suffering as well as a more common framework and language for the development of appropriate Christian responses to them
- (5) Encourage the churches and agencies to speak and work together in response to these situations
- (6) Pray for the flourishing of God's kingdom in the midst of discrimination, persecution, and martyrdom

### *Nature of the Consultation*

- (1) Voices of suffering churches — The voices of suffering churches should be lifted up as much as possible.
- (2) Working consultation — This will be a gathering not only for listening, but also for discerning and deciding how to move forward together.
- (3) Spirituality of the consultation — While this is a working consultation, it is also a time for spiritual discernment and prayer, considering what it means to follow Christ together in a world of discrimination, persecution and martyrdom.
- (4) Inter-church — The uniqueness of the consultation is its breadth of representation of Christian churches and organisations. This aspect will be lifted up wherever possible. At the same time, the consultation must address the real tensions between churches in relation to situations of discrimination, persecution, and martyrdom.

- (5) Global Christian Forum culture — A foundational element of GCF gatherings is building relationships and recognizing marks of living faith in Christ in one another. May this consultation have a similar culture.
- (6) Non-public — The consultation will have low public visibility in order to provide a safe space for all participants and for honest exchange between us.

### *Potential Outcomes*

- (1) During the consultation, participants will have heard from and discerned with the full spectrum of global Christianity the call to ‘follow Christ together in discrimination, persecution, and martyrdom’.
- (2) By the end of the consultation, each participant and each participant body will have articulated potential ‘next steps’ in response to this call — next steps for themselves and next steps with other participants and participant bodies. Existing initiatives may be strengthened. New initiatives may arise.
- (3) At the end of the consultation, participants may issue a joint message to the churches.
- (4) After the consultation, participants will receive materials (news releases, photos, videos, a comprehensive report) from the organisers, enabling them better to share the experience with their own churches, organisations, and communities.





Photo: Kim Calin

# Session One – Opening Plenary

H.B. Archbishop  
Anastasios, Orthodox  
Autocephalous  
Church of Albania

## **Moderator:**

Rev Nicta Lubaale, General Secretary,  
Organisation of African Instituted Churches,  
Global Christian Forum

## **Welcome from Albanian Churches:**

His Beatitude Archbishop Dr Anastasios,  
Orthodox Autocephalous Church of Albania

Bishop George Anthony Frendo,  
Catholic Archdiocese of Tiranë-Durrës

Rev Akil Pano, Evangelical Alliance of Albania

## **Introduction to the consultation:**

Rev Dr Larry Miller, Global Christian Forum

**Hopes for the consultation:**

Rev Dr David Wells, Pentecostal World Fellowship

Bishop Ephraim Tendero, World Evangelical Alliance

Rev Dr Olav Fyske Tveit, World Council of Churches

Cardinal Kurt Koch, Pontifical Council for Promoting  
Christian Unity, Catholic Church

Message from His Holiness Pope Francis

**Discrimination, Persecution and Martyrdom in the  
Twenty-First Century**

Dr Andrea Riccardi, Catholic Church



the words “Christ is risen” in Albanian. I proceeded to light the candle, chanting “*Krishti u ngjall!*” One after another, the faithful few who were present lit their candles and responded in tears with the words “*Vërtetë u ngjall*” (Truly, he is risen). Since then, the phrase “Christ is risen” has become the motto with which we have carried on all these years. It illumined the heavy autumn melancholy and dark cold winter that followed. During your stay in Tirana, you can see some of the signs of the resurrection and growth of the Orthodox Church that has happened during these last 23 years.

May the Lord bless our meeting and help us to examine more deeply our theme and propose new forms of support for persecuted Christians around the world. May he strengthen our fraternal relations and give us new enthusiasm to face discrimination, persecution and martyrdom while following Christ together. Surrounded by countless martyrs of the Church, with eyes fixed on Christ, we run towards the final goal, not discouraged. We know on whom we have placed our hope (2 Tim 1:12) and face each adversity looking forward in faith to the crucified and resurrected Lord, with the certainty that the resurrection does not come after the Cross, but actually is located within the Cross.



## Welcome from the Catholic Church in Albania

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*Bishop George Anthony Frendo*, O.P., General Secretary,  
Episcopal Conference of Albania and Auxiliary Bishop of  
Tiranë-Durrës

---

On behalf of the Catholic community in Albania, I welcome you, while I express my desire that this meeting be for all of us an expression of faith, hope, and charity.

First of all, it is an expression of faith. The slogans of the secular city, according to Harvey Cox, are love, fraternity, solidarity, peace, justice, freedom, human dignity, human rights, etc. These, Cox says, are all basically Christian values. But they remain just slogans and can never become concrete and directive values unless they are inspired by that faith which enlightens us in such a way that we see the face of God in the face of every man. That is why Mother Teresa shook the foundations of the society of anonymity. One cannot ask what she did without asking also why she did it. She did it because she believed in him who said, "Whatever you have done to the least of my brethren, you have done it to me." And this is what distinguishes Christian love from philanthropy.

Second, it is an expression of hope. Salvation history teaches us that there is no evil from which the almighty God cannot draw something good. Jacob's sons, driven by envy towards their brother Joseph, sold him to the Egyptians. Later on, when the Pharaoh appointed Joseph as his deputy, Joseph's brothers were obliged to go to Egypt to buy food. When they noticed that Pharaoh's deputy was their brother Joseph, they all feared that he would take revenge on them. Yet Joseph said to them, "You did me harm, but God turned it into something good as you can see. ... Do not be afraid! I will take care of you and your children" (Gen 50:20-21). In Revelation 6:10, the souls of the martyrs cry out to God, asking how long it will be before he vindicates them. Such a desire (and refusal to be driven to despair) shows total trust in the power and will of God: "I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed unto him against that day" (2 Tim 1:12).

And finally, it is an expression of charity, which translates itself in love and solidarity with the victims of persecution and with their families. As a young person, I shared the ideas of the young people who, in the 1960s, were reacting against the status quo of contemporary society. I remember the beatniks and the interesting life pattern that they adopted in California, far from the maddening crowd of the cities; their lifestyle was a clear message to that society. I remember the students' revolts in many European cities in 1968. I too shared those dreams at that time. I too imagined that society was badly in need of a radical change of its structures. But I think that what the world has passed through, especially in the past twenty years, has only convinced us that this is far from true. What the world needs is not a change of structures, but a change of hearts. Only love can change hearts. I remember a song that was very popular in my childhood: "Love makes the world go round." May our love be always an expression of our deep conviction that only love can change the world.

"God is love." This is how St John has defined God. Consequently, no war can ever be waged in the name of God.

## Welcome from the Evangelical Alliance of Albania

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*Rev Akil Pano*, General Secretary, Evangelical Alliance of Albania

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I am honoured to bring warmest greetings and brotherly love from the Evangelical Church of Albania in your presence today. Over two years ago, I was representing the Evangelical Church of Albania in the Orthodox-Evangelical initiative organized by the Lausanne movement here in Albania, and I had the privilege to meet Dr Larry Miller. He shared with me about this gathering, which was still being planned at that time. When I was told that the Global Christian Forum was considering Albania together with two other locations for this event, I gave my brother all the reasons why such an important event had to take place in Albania at this time.

The first reason is the history of the Christian church of Albania and the apostolic tradition of faith. The Gospel was brought to our territory by the early Christians.

The second reason is the perseverance of the saints in this land. We have a history of persecution lasting 500 years, having been under the Ottoman Empire from the fifteenth to the twentieth century, followed by a severe communist dictatorship that by its constitution changed Albania into the only truly atheist country in the world.

But there is another reason why Albania is a proper country to host such an important event. In Albania, God has favoured us to experience the rise of his church. Here we can witness his word to be true that indeed he brings out beauty from ashes. The story of Albanian Christianity continues with the church after its centuries of persecution. Holding this event in such a place is important because in this context we all can understand that there is life after death. We all can comprehend that the old dead bones can still live when God's word is being proclaimed with the power of the Holy Spirit. We can see a little teenage boy fight a mighty giant and win. God wants to show us that he is leading his people through the rough places of life. Sometimes he is allowing the storm of discrimination, persecution and martyrdom to bring us to the place of total surrender, to sanctify us and to

help us to change the manmade universe with ourselves at the centre. These are the times when we can see the cross of Christ inviting us to fellowship with Christ and in his sufferings. But I believe that this is a reminder of God's faithfulness.

Many years ago on the battlefield, after they had suffered defeat, Israel pleaded with God for help and he granted them a miraculous victory. Their priest and leader, Samuel, set up a monument to remind them of God's strong hand in their triumph. Samuel named the pillar Ebenezer, saying, "Thus far the Lord has helped us." This stone pillar called God's people to recall the many times when God turned events from bad to blessing.

"I will utter hidden things, things from ancient times", the psalmist said—things we have heard and known, things our ancestors have told us, to help you remember God's power, to give you trust and confidence in him, to teach you to lean on him to be your Ebenezer for as long as you live on this side of heaven.

This morning in my home I remembered the two discouraged disciples walking confused and alone on their road for reasons that we today may know. They were not aware of the fact that the Lord Jesus Christ was walking with them on that road. The very Christ was walking with them! He was speaking to them, but they were too loaded with the burdens, pressures and fears of this life so it was not possible for them to see the reality of his presence. Only when he ministered to them the bread did something unusual happen: their eyes opened.

It is the same with the Church today but with a little difference. Although we know and proclaim that Christ is risen and is alive forevermore, many times we miss him as he is walking with us on the roads of this life. The same pressures, burdens and fears of life don't allow us to acknowledge that he is indeed with us. But when he breaks his bread, our eyes are opened and we can see him. We have fellowship with Christ, partake of the emblems of his covenant, and stay connected to him. Allowing him to minister to us his divine word will give us all power and all encouragement to finish our race faithfully and humbly. May the risen Christ minister to us as we stay close to him these days.

May he give us his living bread to feed our faith and open our eyes to see him as he walks together with us on the roads of this life. And if it happens that someday you feel discouraged and dismayed, remember these days in Albania. Remember the rising again of the Church here and God's faithfulness. God who turned the ashes into beauty in Albania can do the same thing for you in your country.

Now to him who is able to keep you from all stumbling and to present you blameless before his glorious presence and with great joy, to the only God our Saviour through Jesus Christ our Lord be glory, majesty, power and authority, before all ages, now and forevermore! Amen (Jude 24–25).