

I would like to start my speech by thanking the organizers and the attendees of this conference for having us today to exchange views and ideas regarding religious freedom. I'll be talking about Syria and some actualities concerning the

..religious freedom under and before the Assad Regime

When I say Syria, I intend to mean a country that was once an example of religious coexistence and an example of fraternity between sects, religions and even ethnic groups, but with the rise of the Baath Party and the group of officers of the so called eighth of March revolution, that gradually turned Syria into a security barracks, Syria turned to be a country which is mono-religious, following a religion-like ideology called the Assadism. Ever-since that, and up till the moment, Syria is still

.suffering the consequences of that horrible disaster

I shall list some examples about events that show the extent of the power of this rogue regime. I will talk about Jabal al-Sheikh, which is one of the most diverse regions in southern Syria with a huge number of sects and ethnicities, as it includes Sunnis, Christians, Druze, and even there are a few Shiites and .Alawites

Those areas were, before the Assad era, an example of coexistence, but under his governance, the challenges began. Any simple meeting between people from two different sects could raise lots of questions about the reason, causes and effects of that meeting, especially if it was between notable figures. Different sects were under the influence of terror and security pressures. This situation made the inter-sect relations .null

The Assad regime also invested in the religious extremism since it started, being one of the sponsors of Al-Qaeda, also, the Assad regime aided in building terrorist forces in Iraq and Afghanistan through security facilities unprecedented in any other country that embraced these organizations.

Subsequently, these organizations became the nucleus of a more aggressive terrorist organization, ISIS, which subsequently preyed on all countries around the world. The Assad regime was and still is the largest container for Shiite terrorist organizations such as (Hezbollah – the Amal Movement/Harakat Amal - Harakat al-Nujaba - Liwa al-Quds) and other organizations that terrorize many countries in the Middle East, including Syria, my country of birth, threatening societal and religious stability between sects. I will not stray too far from these organizations that strongly encourage religious extremism and recruit underage children through security and political facilities from the Assad regime in Al-Bukamal and Sayyida Zainab in southern Syria, Aleppo and Damascus.

In August 2018, ISIS launched a terrorist attack on As-Suwayda Governorate, which is inhabited by the majority of the Mowahidon Druze (unitarians). That attack was bloody, resulting in hundreds of victims, mostly children, women and the elderly. But how did that happen?

This was done through the transfer of terrorist groups of ISIS south of Damascus to the Suwayda desert with all their heavy gear, and this was a major decision by the head of the regime to punish the Suwayda Governorate for its refusal to submit to the Assad regime, and the continuation of the activity of the anti-regime movements.

Today, The terrorist regime of Iran controls southern Syria and most of the sensitive centers and is carrying out a large-scale process aiming to convert non Shiite Syrians, including sunnis, druze, and Christian, to the Shiite religion. Taking advantage of all the difficult living conditions, and using illegal tools such as drugs and prostitution to encourage youth and young men and women to convert to shiism. Iran is doing a malignant role in

demographic change, which had and is affecting tens of thousands of Sunni families, seized their properties and turned them into mercenary families in its sectarian militias

I am from the Ghouta area of Damascus, and I lived there. I experienced a siege for more than 5 years. Most of that siege was carried out by Shiite militias fighting for a sectarian goal rather than a guaranteed political goal. That siege was with the complicity of ISIS, which took advantage of its security relations with the regime and tightened the siege on two sides, one for the Iranian militias, and another for ISIS

I am here not only representing myself as a Syrian American who worships freedom and liberty, but also my people in Syria, they are moderate and peaceful Muslims, Christian, jews, and other minorities, who have called for freedom, democracy and social justice, but this matter poses a great danger to a closed and sectarian system that does not want good for anyone but itself. But we, the people of Syria, want our country to be a country for all, for all sects and ethnicities, a country where religious, personal and social freedoms prevail

We do not want to be a security, Baathist, or sectarian country.

.We want a democratic Federal country that includes everyone The Assad regime is the most terrorizing, extreme and criminal regime in the whole world. It is the main reason for any religious terrorism and any societal closure in the middle east. It has encouraged extremism and terrorism. It has never pushed for religious coexistence and brotherhood. Rather, it has always closed religious societies tightly for fear that they would agree one day to end it

Today, the international community should look closely at Syria's ancient and modern history and see what the Assad regime has done in terms of supporting extremism and

terrorism, supporting religious closure, and supporting religious based hate crimes. There is no way for the renaissance of Syria, the renaissance of the Middle East, religious liberation and mutual respect unless there are countries ruled by peoples through absolute democracy. There is no way to do that without prosecuting war criminals and terrorists in Syria and other countries in the Middle East, such as Lebanon, Yemen and .Iraq

.Thank you so much for your time, and god bless you all