



Current Wave of Islamist Violence Poses Existential Threat to Middle East Christians, says Bat Ye'or

Long-term Grounds for "Optimism" in the Arab Spring Uprisings

<http://www.reuters.com/article/2014/03/26/csi-bat-yelor-mideast-idUSNpnbpcRpz+84+PRN20140326>

GENEVA, March 26, 2014 /PRNewswire-USNewswire/ -- The historian Bat Ye'or sees long-term grounds for "optimism" in the so-called "Arab Spring" uprisings. Speaking at a Christian Solidarity International (CSI) event in Geneva on March 20, Bat Ye'or declared "the Arab Spring has revealed to us that Muslims populations themselves will fight with much strength and courage to bring freedom and democracy to their countries." She pointed to the rejection of "fundamentalist movements" in Tunisia and Egypt as "a very encouraging sign," amidst the turmoil that today remains characteristic of the region.

But notwithstanding the signs of hope within the Arab protest movement, Bat Ye'or said that Middle East Christians remain largely "hostages in their own countries." "We need to talk about the fate of these Christians," she warned, "otherwise they may not survive."

Bat Ye'or said that the current wave of anti-Christian persecution and religious violence in the Middle East must be understood in terms of the historical systems of *jihad* and *dhimmitude*. Ye'or originally coined the term *dhimmitude* to describe the "particular, elaborate system of second-class citizenship" experienced by Jews and Christians, or *dhimmis* ("protected ones"), in Islamic civilization. Historically, this system required Jews and Christians to pay an extra tax, refrain from public expressions of their faith and criticisms of Islam, accept a legal order that privileged Muslim testimony, and submit to Muslim rule – all as preconditions for "protection" or survival in Muslim-controlled lands.

"The goal of jihad is to impose dhimmitude," Bat Ye'or said, and the rationale of present anti-Christian violence in the region "is to bring back extreme forms of dhimmitude," following the partial emancipation of Middle Eastern Christians in the 19th century and the European colonial period.

Without an understanding of dhimmitude, Bat Ye'or said, atrocities against Middle Eastern Christians appear to Western observers only as "unlinked, unfortunate events." "But if we recognize the system of dhimmitude, we can anticipate future developments, act on those developments, and help alleviate the suffering of the victims." Bat Ye'or noted that Muslims are often also victims of violent jihad.

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SOURCE Christian Solidarity International (CSI)

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