

34th Niwano Peace Prize:

Bishop Dr. Munib A. Younan

Bishop of The Evangelical Lutheran Church in Jordan and Holy Land (ELCJHL)

Former President of The Lutheran World Federation (LWF)

The 34th Niwano Peace Prize will be awarded to Bishop Dr. Munib A. Younan of Palestine who has shown perseverance and compassion in his work to encourage dialogue between interreligious groups in the Holy Land. In a world characterized by leaders who seek to emphasise difference and hatred, Bishop Younan has consistently strived for the opposite. His work emphasises peace over power and unity over domination. Bishop Younan embodies the qualities that the Niwano Peace Foundation value in religious leaders, and through this award, the Niwano Peace Prize Committee wholeheartedly pay homage to his work.

Bishop Younan was born to Palestinian refugees into a world where nation, religion, and place are intimately connected with identity. The ongoing conflict between Israelis and Palestinians has been a prime example of the break down in communication between people whose differences appear to outweigh their similarities. The conflict between people of the three dominant religious identities has consistently been forcing Muslims, Jews, and Christians further apart, to a point where violence appears to be the only mode of retaliation. Despite these complex challenges, Bishop Younan has worked with dedication to foster conversation between Jews, Christians, and Muslims in Jerusalem and beyond.

Bishop Younan is former President of the Lutheran World Federation and former chairperson of the Lutheran Council in Asia. Over his long career he has held numerous positions in Lutheran and interfaith organisations, and has used his position to establish a wide-ranging network between religious leaders of different faiths in the Middle East. Bishop Younan was one of the fourteen religious leaders who signed the Alexandria Declaration in 2002, a document in which Rabbis, Sheiks, and Bishops pledged their commitment to establishing peace in the Holy Land, which is holy to all three faiths. His ecumenical work emphasises commonality between religions and religious denominations, which is integral in the struggle towards peace.

Bishop Younan is a renowned public speaker and has travelled both locally and abroad to share lectures and speeches on what makes for a just peace from a Palestinian Christian perspective based on Christian teachings and doctrine. He also has a rich list of publications that have featured his writings on peace, including his own books, *Witnessing for Peace: in Jerusalem and the World*, and *Our Shared Witness: A Voice for Justice and Reconciliation*.

His own gift for sharing valuable lessons has spread into his work towards reconciling Christian, Muslim, and Jewish Israelis and Palestinians through dialogue. Bishop Younan is a strong believer in the healing power of dialogue and has worked since 1991 to create spaces where people of different faiths can meet in peace. In these important spaces, people who have been taught to hate one another are able to come together through joint reflection and dialogue with the aim to reconcile their differences. The Niwano Peace Foundation commends Bishop Younan's tireless work to foster dialogue and interfaith healing.

Bishop Younan has been an exemplary faith leader for decades and continues to spread his light with kindness and compassion. He has shown that through the work of dialogue, which requires an opening of the self towards another, it is possible to bridge rifts of difference and slowly make the spaces between Muslims, Jews, and Christians smaller. The Niwano Peace Foundation commends his tireless contribution and achievements, and it is with great pride that the 34th Peace Prize is awarded to him as the worthy and deserving recipient.