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## **The context for the publication of “A Common Word” - outline**

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The open letter was published 13 October 2007 and signed by 138 Muslims scholars, with additional signatures since reaching 305 by end of March 2009. It is addressed to the leaders of all the major Christian denominations. The signatories cover all branches of Islam : Sunni, Shi'ite, Ibadī; Sufi, Salafi; academics, government officials, independent scholars; etc. It is thus an historical document – the first time that an Islamic *oikumene* has thus addressed itself to the Christian *oikumene*.

The initiative came from the group based in the Hashimite royal family of Jordan which, in November 2004, had issued the “Amman Declaration”, an attempt to bring together a variety of Muslim voices to make a positive statement about what constitutes Islam in the face of extremist forms. It thus condemns terrorism and the practice of accusing opponents of heresy (*kufir – takfir*).

The group then responded to the Regensburg lecture of Pope Benedict XVI (13 September 2006) with a statement correcting the perceived mistakes of the Pope. It then proceeded to produce the open letter and get the required support for publishing it a year later.

For extensive documentation, see the website [www.acommonword.com](http://www.acommonword.com), which also includes the texts of 65 very varied Christian responses.

Public knowledge of the open letter varies enormously. Most official church institutions have read it and related to it somehow. But it has also been noted that Muslim signatures become less frequent the further east in the Muslim world one moves. A few joint Muslim-Christian conferences have been held around it (Yale, Cambridge).

Six months later King Abdallah of Saudi Arabia publicly called for a dialogue between Muslims, Christians and Jews. This led to an international Muslim conference at the end of May 2008 in Mecca to review the attitude of Islam to other faiths and, at the beginning of July 2008, an international multifaith conference in Madrid sponsored jointly by the kings of Saudi Arabia and Spain. When Abdallah's first statement was made, one senior Saudi cleric had pointed out that the unmentioned target of the initiative was the Islamic extremists. This echoes the voices around the Jordanian royal family which for some years have expressed concern at the failure of the 'moderate' majority of Muslims to stand up to the hard-liners. Both of these initiatives are a (possibly coordinated?) attempt to redress the balance.