Thank you, Mr/Mme President.

The Commission of the Churches on International Affairs of the World Council of Churches and the World Evangelical Alliance would like to express our grave concern over the situation of Freedom of Religion or Belief in Iran.

In May of this year, Iranian authorities raided the Assyrian Evangelical Presbyterian Church in Tabriz, changed the locks, tore down the cross from the church tower, installed monitoring equipment and ordered the church warden to leave.

Prior to this incident, during Christmas 2018, authorities prevented pastors from other churches and regions in Iran from visiting the Tabriz church, for a joint Christmas worship service.

The Assyrian people are recognized as an ethnic Christian group in Iran, and have a representative in the Iranian Parliament. In an open letter to the Iranian President, the Assyrian member of the Iranian parliament, Mr. Yonathan Betkolia, called for the church to be reopened.

This church closure was the latest episode in eight years of pressure and discrimination against the Evangelical Presbyterian churches and their leaders in Iran. Church property has been seized, and some church leaders were pressured to leave the country.

We appeal to the Iranian authorities to return the Tabriz church building and property to the Evangelical Presbyterian Synod, and to allow it to re-open. We also call on the Iranian authorities to put an end to the campaign of intimidation of church leaders, and of confiscation of church property.

Thank you Mr/Mme President.