

# THE PRISON AUTHORITY OF THE STATE OF ISRAEL GRANTED A CERTIFICATE OF APPRECIATION TO PATRIARCH THEOPHILOS III

His Beatitude Theophilos III

Patriarch of Jerusalem

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Your Beatitude,

Bless us! This letter is to report and explain to You, for which reason Your Beatitude has been presented with a certificate of appreciation from the Prison Authority of the State of Israel.

We, Prothiereus Romanos Raduan, Hieromonk Seraphim Goldberg and Alexander Frel, as a group, visit Orthodox Christian prisoners in places of confinement throughout Israel on a regular basis (about once a month). This work was started in 2003 by His Eminence Timothy, Metropolitan of Vostra, and since then we have been visiting a total amount of about 40 prisoners in a dozen different prisons located in the Center (Ramla and the Tel Aviv area), the North (Tiberias, Afula and Haifa areas), and the South (Beersheva).

Our visits are carried out separately from other private visits and consist of prayer, reading the Holy Scripture, discussion, confession and, since January 2005, the Divine Liturgy twice a year, once at Christmas time and the second at Easter in one of the prisons, Ayalon in Ramla, where we have about 20 Orthodox Christian prisoners. We also performed the

Divine Liturgy once in Tselmon, a prison near Tiberias. With the authorization of the prison authorities we performed the holy sacrament of baptism upon a Russian-speaking Israeli prisoner, who was registered as a Christian, but who was not baptized, and the holy sacrament of marriage upon an Israeli Arab prisoner. Most of the Orthodox Christian prisoners, whom we visit, are Russian-speaking Israelis, but we do have some Israeli Arabs, a Moldovan and a Greek.

We began this work in 2003 upon the invitation of the prisoners themselves, who found us through some Latin nuns. Prisoners started calling, asking us to come and we applied for and received a special permission from the Prison Security through the Prison Rabbinate. We have to renew the permission every six months. We have maintained a close contact with the prisoners since that time both through our visits and by telephone. We bring the prisoners agiasma, antidoron, Orthodox Christian spiritual books, icons, crosses, candles and incense. We also maintain contact with the 5 of our prisoners, who have finished their sentences and are now free, as well as with relatives of prisoners.

We thank our All-Merciful Lord Jesus Christ for this blessing, and we pray that He may allow us to continue this work for the salvation of His creation and for His glory.

Attached herewith please find a report on the meeting, which was held at the Prison Administration in Ramla by the Chief Rabbi of Prisons in Israel, Yakutiel Yehuda Wizner, on February 16, 2009, during which we were presented with the above-mentioned certificate.

Soliciting Your Beatitude's prayers and blessings,

Prothiereus Romanos Raduan

Hieromonk Seraphim Goldberg

Alexander Frel

Jerusalem

February 18, 2009

Cc: T.E. Aristarchos, Archbishop of Constantina, Chief Secretary of the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate of Jerusalem & Theofylaktos, Archbishop of Jordan.

**Report on meeting at Prison Administration in Ramla on February 16, 2009**

On February 16, 2009, we, Prothiereus Romanos Raduan, Hieromonk Seraphim Goldberg and Alexander Frel, as a group visiting Orthodox Christian prisoners in places of confinement in the State of Israel, attended a meeting for Christian volunteers held by the Rabbinate of State Prisons at the headquarters of the Prison Administration in Ramla. The goal of the meeting was not announced ahead of time. Despite the fact that there was no formal invitation, the meeting itself was formal and we were asked from which organization we come. Our response was that we come from the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate of Jerusalem.

The meeting was called: **“Evaluation and Recognition of the Work of Christian Volunteers”**

Presiding over the meeting: **Chief Rabbi Yakutiel Yehuda Wizner, Head of the Prison Rabbinate,**

Present at the meeting: **Deputy Chief Rabbis Shlomi Cohen & Ofer Elmehiah, Chief Rabbi of Central Prisons Salman, Lt. Col. Ian Domnitz, Chief of International Relations.**

**Prothiereus Romanos Raduan, Hieromonk Seraphim Goldberg & Alexander Frel (Greek Orthodox Patriarchate of Jerusalem).**

**Spanish & English-speaking clergy & nuns (6 representatives from the Latin Patriarchate), who visit Latin prisoners.**

**Agnes Shehadeh, director of the "House of Mercy", a Uniate organization, which actively visits prisoners regardless of their faith and their families and provides services to ex-prisoners. With her were a Uniate priest, a Maronite priest & 4 more representatives.**

**Anis Barghoun & 5 more representatives of the "House of Light", a Protestant organization, which actively visits prisoners and their families and offers them gifts.**

**Retired Brig. General Zvi Givati from "Christian friends of Israel" with a Romanian Protestant.**

Chief Rabbi Wizner opened the meeting in Hebrew with a comment on the strength of repentance and the rehabilitation of prisoners through religion, a theme he felt all of us as religious people could associate with. He mentioned that his goal is to strengthen the activities of Christian organizations in Israeli prisons. He said that there are now 700 Christian prisoners in Israel. He informed us that he has just promoted 3 new chief rabbis for the northern, central and southern prisons, asking us to arrange our meeting through them. (In the past we arranged for our meetings through the rabbi of each prison). His words were translated into English by Lt. Col. Ian Domnitz, Chief of International Relations.

Chief Rabbi Wizner introduced his colleagues and gave a summary of what the meeting was going to be about: thanking us, presenting us with certificates and a debate on our

activities. He then asked us to introduce ourselves. We did and all of us thanked him for the invitation and some spoke briefly about their activities and the problems that we encounter during our visits (delays, refusal to bring food to the prisoners, etc). Chief Rabbi Wizner said that the rabbis encounter similar difficulties.

Following the introductions, Chief Rabbi Wizner presented 4 organizations with a certificate of recognition, underlining its activities. Only the "Christian Friends of Israel" were not rewarded. The meeting and the presentation of certificates was extensively covered by a photographer.

Last of all, Chief Rabbi Wizner asked us to synchronize our efforts and announced the forming of a steering committee after Passover. When asked for more precise information, he said that we would be informed after Passover.

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