

MR. OLAV TVEIT, THE NEWLY – ELECTED SECRETARY GENERAL OF WCC VISITS THE PATRIARCHATE OF JERUSALEM

On Thursday 27th of November/10th of December 2009, Mr. Olav Tveit, the newly-elected General Secretary of the World Council of Churches (WCC) visited His Beatitude and our Father, Patriarch of the Holy City of Jerusalem and all Palestine Theophilos III. Mr. Olav Tveit is from Norway and was elected as the new General Secretary of the WCC at the 59th Central Committee of the World Council of Churches that took place between the 26th of August and 3rd of September 2009. He fully assumed his duties on January 1st 2010, replacing the previous Secretary General, Rev. Samuel Cobia, whose term expired on the 31st of December 2009.

This visit took place within the framework of the PIEF (Palestine–Israel Ecumenical Forum), an ongoing initiative of the WCC. The PIEF was founded in Amman, Jordan, in June 2007 to contribute to the peace efforts in the Middle East.

At this 2007 meeting, Rev. Samuel Cobia participated as the Secretary General of the WCC, who then visited Jerusalem and the Patriarchate.

This peace initiative was continued at the General Meeting of the members of this Body in the city of Bethlehem between the 10th and 14th of December 2009.

Prior to the start of deliberations of this Section, representatives of the WCC visited the Patriarchate and invited His Beatitude the Patriarch to attend the beginning of

the General Meeting on Friday 28th of November/ 11th of December 2009.

The new Secretary General expressed his pleasure at visiting the Patriarchate, and expressed his gratitude for the Patriarchate's cooperation with the WCC. His Beatitude welcomed the new Secretary General and congratulated him on his election whilst reaffirming His will that the Patriarchate continues to cooperate with the WCC, as the most ancient and the only autocephalous Church in the Holy Land that preserves the religious character of Jerusalem as an open city for all nations.

His Beatitude referred to the problems that some Christian groups cause to the peace-making efforts in the Middle East, following extreme stances based on the literal interpretation of the Holy Scriptures. He also referred to the attempt of the Israeli Antiquities Authority to repair the closed exterior entrance of the western wall of the Church of Resurrection.

On the subject of inter-faith dialogue, His Beatitude said that "This is proper for other regions, but for us in the Middle East, something deeper is present, the peaceful symbiosis throughout the centuries".

"The Patriarchate is interested in matters and problems relating to Christians in the Holy Land", His Beatitude said, "and assists them by administering access permits to Jerusalem from the West Bank/Palestinian Territories, by means of scholarships for further studies, in assisting health institutions and others. He further continued, "On the matter of the city of Jerusalem we do not accept its exclusivity to anyone." His Beatitude then addressed the need of assisting and helping the Christians in Israel.

Mr. Olav Tveit expressed his thanks to His Beatitude for the role of the Patriarchate, a role of support and assistance to the Christians but also to members of other religions.

His Beatitude offered to Mr. Olav Tveit on the occasion of his election and visit a carved silver sphere depicting a miniature of the Holy City as a symbol of peace, and offered to the other representatives commemorative medallions in celebration of 2000 years of Christianity, as well as photograph albums documenting various ceremonies performed by the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate.

At the Lutheran's Church International Center of Bethlehem (ICB), on Friday 28th of November/11th of December 2009, the day after the visit of the Secretary General of the WCC Mr. Olav Tveit, the General Meeting was held by the members of the section PIEF (Palestine-Israel Ecumenical Forum), founded by the WCC for the promotion of peace in the Middle East.

His Beatitude arrived at the International Center of Bethlehem escorted by the Chief Secretary His Eminence Aristarchos Archbishop of Constantina, His Eminence Dorotheos Archbishop of Avilla, the Patriarchal Representative in Bethlehem His Eminence Theophylaktos Archbishop of Jordan River, Father Aissa Musleh, from the village of Beit Sahour who is the Patriarchal correspondent for the Arabic Media, deacon Fr. Athanasios, the distinguished businessman Mr. Aissa Zrekat from Kerak of Jordan and Mrs. Waffa Ksous Director of the Section of the Middle East Council of Churches (MECC) based in Jordan.

On the commencement of the programme, the Lutheran Bishop in Jerusalem Right Rev. Munib Yunan welcomed His Beatitude and all the participants at the Meeting. The General Secretary Rev. Olav Tveit emphasized the importance of continuance of the 'Amman Call', for the promotion and strengthening of peace, the importance of the meeting and especially in Bethlehem, the place where the incarnate Son and Logos of God, Prince of Peace, our Lord Jesus Christ was born.

"We are obliged", said Rev. Olav Tveit, "to utilize all the strength of the Spirit, which God poured in our hearts, in

order to send forth from this place a message of hope and optimism". With these words he then invited His Beatitude as Patriarch of Jerusalem, and as the President of the MECC, to bless the works of the Meeting.

His Beatitude Patriarch of Jerusalem Theophilos III then addressed the participants. (Please see the following link for the full text of His Beatitude's address <https://en.jerusalem-patriarchate.info/2009/12/11/606/>).

Messages were also given by the outgoing Secretary General of the WCC Rev. Samuel Cobia, the Secretary General of the MECC Mr. Jiries Saleh, from National Boards of Churches, and from Local Ecumenical Organizations.

The President of the Palestinian Authority Mr. Mahmoud Abbas was represented by the Chief of Staff, Dr. Rafiq Al-Husseini, who analysed the framework of the Christian-Muslim relations in the Middle East and the broader area, based on the treaty between the Patriarch of Jerusalem Sophronios and Caliph Omar Al-Hatab and the political impasse in the peace negotiations between Israel and the Palestinians.

The deliberations of the Meeting continued until Saturday, the 12th of December 2009.

Chief Secretary's Office

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