

SPEECH TO THE MAYOR AND THE MUNICIPAL GOVERNMENT OF JERUSALEM

His Beatitude

THEOPHILOS III

Patriarch of Jerusalem

The New Year 2009

26th January 2010

Your Excellency, Mr Barkat, Mayor of Jerusalem,

Honorable Members of the Municipal Government,

Distinguished Guest,

“Nevertheless I must journey today, tomorrow, and the day following; for it cannot be that a prophet should perish outside of Jerusalem”. (Luke 13:33).

By the grace of God we meet here again this year as: “children under the wings of Jerusalem” (Isaiah). This distinguished gathering of spiritual leaders, municipal officers, diplomats and honorable guests is all because of our commitment and love for this Holy City of Jerusalem.

These days we celebrate the New Year and we take the opportunity to celebrate the uniqueness of Jerusalem. The fact that our city is sacred to all of us who represent the three monotheistic religions: Judaism, Christianity and Islam, is

the main factor for the inducement it raises among the people of the world. But the city is also greatly valued for its multi-cultural and ethnico-religious diversity. These characteristics which synthesize the identity of Jerusalem must drive us to effect the conclusion that more effort should be exerted to join our forces for the peace of this Holy City and against anything resisting the makeup of this great place.

Experience has shown Us that Authority, whether given through public or internal elections or appointment, is given by the grace of God, for it is a great responsibility and harbors with it great accountability. It is not at all a license to power or a justification to exclude our surrounding factors or the interest of those who are around us.

Our Church establishments follow and guard spiritual rituals. In addition these long standing Christian institutions have provided for a lot more. They bear the responsibilities that touch upon people's spiritual and material needs. We run civil service institutions and along with the governmental authorities we share the burden of providing education, health services and social care. Moreover, our historic, i.e. spiritual and physical heritage, as well as our moral mission justly entitles us to be taken in account; and this no less than for the common benefit of all.

The Patriarchate of Jerusalem, the "Mother Church", together with the Christian Churches have jealously guarded the historic rights, privileges and ancient customs through what has been accepted as the "Status Quo"; and to continue the guarantee of protection for those interests, especially related to Holy Places and to our communities, efforts should be enhanced to further apply "the practice of abstention from interference". That, of course, without infringing upon the responsibilities and duties of the civic authority.

Let us be reminded that this City is not an earthly reality alone; but a reflection of the heavenly Jerusalem that has enough space to accommodate all of her children with love and forgiveness; for we all are answerable to the Almighty, who in the words of the Prophet:

“...shall rejoice over you...For there shall be no one like you, O Jerusalem...” (Isaiah 62:4-7)

Happy New Year!