

SPEECH OF HIS BEATITUDE THEOPHILOS III BEFORE THE MECC

Speech before the Executive Committee of the
Middle East Council of Churches

**His Beatitude Theophilos III
Patriarch of Jerusalem**

20 April 2010

“Your Beatitudes, Eminences, Graces,

Your Excellencies fellow clergy,

Sisters and Brothers in Christ,

Christ is Risen, He is indeed Risen.

It is a great honour and privilege for the “Mother Church” of all Christendom. The Patriarchate of Jerusalem to host this distinguished gathering of the executive committee of the Middle East Council of Churches in Our beloved Holy Land here in Amman under the wise and enlightened leadership of His Majesty King Abdulla II, may God guard him.

In the Middle East in general and in Holy Jerusalem in particular, we have a diminishing congregation to protect, a fine line amidst political turmoil to walk, centuries’ old status quo to preserve, a priceless Heritage to maintain, and on top of all spiritual duties to perform.

We shall not allow the special circumstances we experience in our respective national domains and spiritual jurisdictions, to deter us from performing our mutual and universal commitments as well as our devoted concern to challenges facing religious communities, entities and Humanity as a whole. It is precisely in this respect that we are convening here today to address the main concern that will only be achieved through adhering to the incarnate message of the Cross and the Resurrection of Our Lord Jesus Christ and his message of Justice, Tolerance and Unity, For it is said: " In truth I perceive that God shows no partiality. But in every nation whoever fears God and works righteousness is accepted by God", (Acts 10:34 & 35).

The radical currents that our world is experiencing demands our perseverance to be the initiators and apostles of spreading the message of the gospel unadulterated; the message of the love of Christ, that is Justice, Peace and reconciliation for nations and people, among Christians and others, grassroots and political echelons.

Performing such a task in a complex environment where some have found an interest in spreading bigotry, violence, aggression and hatred is risky. Reconciliation with Almighty God and our common efforts as Church Leaders and clergy among us and our flock is the only way to engage the inherent risks and succeed in this task of spreading the message of Love, Justice and Peace. For as Saint Paul says: "...we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness...", (Eph. 6:12).

The ongoing crisis in the MECC is in its essence structural and administrative. The financial component is only one of its symptoms. Therefore, there is a need to approach this crisis in a comprehensive way.

The MECC should be modelled to fit in the needs and aspirations of the member churches but also needs to adapt to these changing and challenging times. Therefore it has to be reconfigured to reflect an up to date vision of itself and of its mission aspirations. Let us be critical to ourselves and courageous enough to tackle this very point along the lines of what We envisaged in our address to the last General Assembly that took place in Cyprus.

There is no doubt that good efforts have been made by the special task force appointed to ensure the MECC survival beyond 2009. It should be acknowledged that the Churches in Lebanon made a substantial financial contribution to the MECC. Therefore, we call on Churches in other countries to follow suit. As far as Our Church is concerned, We are ready to fulfill our responsibilities and make our contribution the very moment that the NEW MECC emerges adopting the above mentioned re- structural vision.

The Executive Committee today is extraordinary by all means. We are asked to take bold and sharp decisions about the near and short term future of the MECC.

Any decision we may take has to be bound by clear guidelines, and realistic timetables; most importantly it has to have secured financial resources ensuring its implementation.

We cannot condone any concessions that undermine the future of the MECC. We have to be tough enough in our decisions and if need be to overcome ourselves as well as our church inclinations and interests.

We are open to all the suggestions and proposals that have the only aim of securing the functionality and sustainability of the MECC as a fellowship of churches that are devoted in the

diaconia and service of our institutions guarding our respective congregations together with our fellow brethren thus encouraging the much needed Christian presence here and now.

To perform such a task we need to intensify our spiritual presence in society, to attract more believers to commit themselves to church teachings, to provide better social services, to enhance education, to subsidize for the unfortunate through welfare programs and to communicate more efficiently among ourselves. This task requires solid promotion of inter-religious dialogue for nurturing mutual respect, symbiosis and coexistence.

Let our faith in the risen Lord Jesus Christ lead our way, let our work be a firm manifestation of Christ's enlightenment, let our human fears be the fuel for our actions, so that the biblical words: "Let justice roll down like water and righteousness".

Please join Us in extending our appreciation and thanks to the sponsors and organisers that worked diligently to organise this meeting of ours".

Christ is Risen, He is indeed Risen".