

HIS BEATITUDE THEOPHILOS' III, SPEECH BEFORE THE PRESIDENT OF ISRAEL FOR THE NEW YEAR 2011.

Mr President,

Honourable Ministers,

Members of Parliament,

Distinguished Guests,

“Therefore the Lord himself shall give you a sign; behold, a virgin shall conceive in the womb, and shall bring forth a son, and thou shalt call his name Emmanuel”. (Isaiah 7:14)

We are highly appreciative of what is a traditional gathering in which we share the Season's cheerfulness, in particular the Christmas spirit, and impart our messages of hope. Events and gatherings such as this are of great significance both for celebrating the common bonds of our humanity, and for reminding ourselves of those fundamental moral values that are essential to our common life. Humanity today is confronted and confused on every side with dark forces of disrespect and even humiliation. And unfortunately much of this is being done in the pretence of religious allegiance and in the name of Almighty God.

As we are here today in a clear expression and manifestation of inter-religious and inter-cultural understanding, presence and symbiosis, it should be acknowledged that any form of polarization; political, social or ideological, have increasingly posed a serious challenge to our humble efforts and our sincere intentions.

We are thankful to the Authorities' efforts in facilitating the access for pilgrims and worshipers that has enhanced a great number of Christian pilgrims from around the world. We commend them to continue this holy and important provision; and allow us to say: "more can always be done" on the local and regional frame. Also we acknowledge the many positive steps that the State of Israel has taken to evaluate our concerns, and we stress the need for the continuation of progress on:

- Continued free movement of the faithful;
- Availability of entry visas for clerics; and
- Honouring the privileges of Tax exemption sanctioned by the sacred history as well as by the historic standing of the "Ownership of Church Property".

The ineffective endeavours to attaining peace should not be disregarded this festive season. This should be a reminder amidst our joyful celebrations that God's will is loud and clear for both the political and religious leadership to persevere in our commitment to reaching reconciliation and peace.

It is our mission, as servants of the Lord and thus of our fellow man, to relentlessly enhance our efforts for improving the living and socio-economic conditions in which people of the Holy Land are passing through and to alleviating the suffering of all affected. We are confronted with challenges and raised concerns for our communities over peaceful coexistence and we feel the urgency to address this, diffuse it and channel the positive outcome to achieving peace.

We are cautious about the rising negative sentiments fuelled by extremists and appeal for the fact that we consider all humans as equal to one another. A perception substantiated in the monotheistic faiths and upheld by the many decent citizens who also feel threatened by the moral decline witnessed today.

Christian institutions and Leadership, in the Holy land, have committed themselves by employing their blessings and resources in constituting peace and reconciliation in the region; for we firmly believe that this enjoins one of the divine commandments of our faith which solidifies our existence and determines our mission.

Our fraternal noble wishes for this happy occasion on the New Year to all Jews, Christians and Muslims, who persistently pursued peace during times of great turmoil, as they set a role model for all those who are inspired by the true and historic prophetic message of the incarnation of the divine logos.

As the custodians and servants of the Holy Places that bare testimony to the sacred history of redemption and salvation of human kind, we time and again commit ourselves to promoting peace and invite every human being to "soul searching"; in order to recognize the other's entitlement to peace, respect and dignity; and we should always remember to behave in the same way as we would like people to behave towards us. For it is written: "... whatever you want man to do to you do also to them for this is the Law and the Prophets" (Matthew 7:12)

Your Excellency, we express our sincere thanks to you for this cordial invitation and for your gracious hospitality. We pray God for his special blessing upon the approaching New Year: may the Divine spirit of this Festive Season warm our hearts, enlighten our minds, and fulfil the lives of all the citizens of the State of Israel. Happy New Year and Hanoucha Samech.

For, as prophet Isaiah says: "... unto us a Child is born, unto us a Son is given; and the government will be upon His shoulder. His name will be called the Angel of Great Counsel, for I shall bring peace upon the rulers, peace and health by Him. Great shall be His government, and of His peace there is no end..." (Isaiah 9:6&7).

His Beatitude

Theophilos III

Patriarch of Jerusalem

29 December 2010