

HIS BEATITUDE ADDRESS OF WELCOME TO HIS EXCELLENCY VICTOR YANUKOVYCH, PRESIDENT OF THE UKRAINE.

Jerusalem, 1 December 2011

Your Excellency, Mr. President,

Esteemed Members of the Ukrainian Delegation,

Your Eminences,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

“You have come to Jerusalem, the city of the living God.” (cf. Heb. 12:22)

We are glad to welcome you to the Patriarchate of Jerusalem, the senior Church institution of the Holy Land, and the Mother of All the Churches. The Patriarchate of Jerusalem embodies the history of Jerusalem, and as such the Patriarchate has remained down the ages the light of the City. For this light shines from the Holy Tomb.

The Patriarchate, together with the Brotherhood of the Holy Sepulchre, has been entrusted by Divine Providence with the ministry as guardians and servants of the Holy Places. As such, we represent not just ourselves alone, but the whole Christian world, and especially our Orthodox brothers and sisters in every land. All Christians, and especially Orthodox Christians, have a claim through the Patriarchate to the spiritual citizenship of Jerusalem.

Your Excellency, we welcome you as the leader of a great nation, with a remarkable history and a unique culture, where

Orthodoxy has a noble heritage. In the formative years of this heritage, the Patriarchate of Jerusalem had an honored place and role.

As you make your State Visit to Israel, nevertheless we welcome you to this Holy Place as a pilgrim, and as a devout member of our Church. Your visit to us is an eloquent testimony to the importance of religion in the life of our modern society. The Scriptures remind us that we “do not live by bread alone” (Matt. 4:4), and religion enables human beings to find meaning in their lives meaning that is crucial for the well-being not simply of the individual, but also of society as a whole. For no society can long endure without the depth of meaning that true religion provides, and we all understand the role of religion in promoting peace, justice, and reconciliation.

We would like to assure you that we watch carefully the unfolding developments in your country and your region in both the civic and the ecclesiastical realms. The Church has always been a force of cohesion and unity in our respective countries, and in this respect we wish to emphasise that we are ready to make our contribution to strengthen this cohesion and further the unity of the Church. Let us, in the words of Saint Paul, “make every effort to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace” (Eph. 4:3).

We are happy that the brotherly relations between the Ukrainian people and the Patriarchate of Jerusalem are deeply rooted. This has no more visible expression than the many thousands of pilgrims from the Ukraine who come to the Holy Land every year, and whom we receive here on almost a daily basis. We see for ourselves the devotion of the Ukrainian people for the Holy Places and for the Patriarchate.

It is for this reason that we would like to take this occasion to bestow upon you, Your Excellency, the highest decoration of the Order of the Holy Sepulchre. May this be a sign of a

bright future for relations between us.

We wish you a pleasant stay in the Holy Land, and every success in your mission.

We assure you also of our prayers for His Beatitude Metropolitan Vladimir, and through you we send our greetings to him.

May God bless you, and may God bless the peoples of theUkraine.

Thank you.

His Beatitude

Theophilos III,

Patriarch of Jerusalem

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