

REMARKS AT A DINNER GIVEN BY DR. WALID HASEN AMBASSADOR OF THE PALESTINE DIPLOMATIC MISSION IN NICOSIA.

Nicosia- Cyprus, 11 February 2012.

Your Excellency, Mr. Ambassador,

Your Beatitude Archbishop Chrysostomos

Respected Members of the Staff of the Mission,

Your Eminences,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

We bring you the greetings of the Church of Jerusalem and the Rum Orthodox Patriarchate, which by Divine Providence extends its pastoral mission throughout all Palestine. We are honoured to be here on our official visit – the *eirenike* – to the ancient and venerable Church of Cyprus.

Founded by the apostle Saint Barnabas, the Church of Cyprus has had an intimate relationship with the Church of Jerusalem down the ages. Indeed as long ago as the year 367, Saint Epiphanius came from the Holy Land to be Bishop of Salamis and Metropolitan of this Church. Both Churches share a common religious and cultural heritage – the so-called “ Rum” heritage of the ancient Christian Church of this region.

Cyprus and Palestine are also connected by the bonds of history that include important economic and trade relationships.

By virtue of this Rum Orthodox identity and our relationship

with our fellow citizens of this region, the Arab Islamic word participates also in this unique heritage.

The Rum Orthodox Church – which is the Orthodox Church throughout the Middle East – has played, and continues to play a vital role in cultivating and maintaining the cultural and religious *symbiosis* of the region. The Church functions both as a link between the political and the cultural life of our peoples and is also a force for reconciliation and peaceful co-existence.

In today's complex political climate we are witness of new realities and serious developments in our region. It is the firm commitment of the Church that what looks impossible in purely political terms to secular-minded people does not look impossible to people of faith. The Orthodox Church is the religious institution with the longest continuous history in this region and our experience down the ages has taught us this.

This means that the spiritual leadership of the Abrahamic landscape, which itself inclusive of all our peoples, has an important say in helping to bring about deeper understanding, mutual respect, and the co-existence of all our ethnic and religious communities.

Under the wise leadership of His Beatitude Archbishop Chrysostomos, the Church of Cyprus has been host to many significant ecumenical and inter-religious conferences and dialogues. Not the least of these has been the recent meeting of the General Assembly of the Middle East Council of Churches, at which Your Excellency was present. We know that you appreciate this crucial work.

We mention all this because the Rum Orthodox Church of this region is aware of our mission, precisely because of our long experience. The Orthodox Church has given itself in maintaining the multi-ethnic and multi-religious landscape or

the Middle East and to supporting a peaceful resolution to the Palestinian/Israeli conflict.

Political instability and financial crisis are intimately connected. This much we know. Therefore the co-operation of the nations of the Middle East and beyond is fundamental to the well-being of all our people. Your work in Cyprus, Mr. Ambassador is evidence of this commitment.

By definition, an *eirenike* is a mission of peace. In this spirit we commend all who work for peace in our region.

We wish to acknowledge the efforts of President Mahmood Abbas, who is deeply sensitive to the mission of the Church in the Holy Land, and we pray for wisdom in his leadership.

We thank His Beatitude Archbishop Chrysostomos for his warm welcome to Cyprus and to the Church, and we assure him of our brotherly prayers for arch pastoral ministry as he spares neither time nor effort in furthering the cause of peace.

And we thank you, Your Excellency, for your gracious hospitality, and for all that you and your staff do to maintain the close relationship between Cyprus and Palestine, which is essential for the peace and stability of our region.

Thank you.

His Beatitude

THEOPHILOS III

Patriarch of Jerusalem.