

# H.B. THE PATRIARCH OF JERUSALEM IS INVITED FOR A LECTURE TO AN INTERNATIONAL INTER-RELIGIOUS CONFERENCE IN KIEV.

From 11-12/ 24-26<sup>th</sup> of April 2012 an International Interreligious Conference was convened in Kiev with the theme the contribution of the religions in the fight against violence and for the promotion and establishment of peace in our modern society.

His Beatitude the Patriarch of Jerusalem Theophilos III was invited to this Conference and gave the lecture which follows:

## “Remarks at the Kyiv Interfaith Forum’s International Conference on Global Winds of Change: Religion’s Role in Today’s World; The Challenges in Democracies and Secular Society

*His Beatitude Theophilos III Patriarch of Jerusalem*

*Dear Mr. Feldman,*

*Esteemed Fellow Participants,*

*Ladies and Gentlemen*

*it will come as no surprise to you that we believe strongly that religious faith plays a role of paramount importance in any vibrant, healthy society. This is so not least because religion and religious affiliation lie at the very heart of the identity of most countries and cultures.*

*If we take our own region of the Middle East as an example, it*

*is religion that determines the primary description of the many ethnic identities of our diverse communities. We see this everywhere, from Baghdad to Damascus, from Beirut to Nicosia, from Cairo to Jerusalem. Without a nuanced understanding both of the religious Identities of our peoples, and of the complex historical relationship that has existed between different communities of faith down the centuries, it is not possible to understand Middle Eastern society. The conflict that currently exists between Israel and Palestine is, at its heart, a matter of religion.*

*We do not deny that in the relations of the nations, diplomacy and political negotiation play a crucial and leading role. And whereas there is a distinction between the mission of the Church and the work of political leadership, it would be naive to ignore the importance of religion in our common life, even in societies that are described as increasingly secular. By definition, the very existence of arguments about "secularism" assumes the importance of religion in the conscious and unconscious life of our society.*

*In our contemporary conflicts around the world, politicians have come to realize more than ever before the power and influence of religious leadership in the work of establishing and maintaining peaceful, harmonious, and just societies. Governments cannot succeed in efforts of peace-building and the extension of Justice to all without the co-operation of religious leadership.*

*If we look, for example, at the present situation of the European Union, we see the paradox on the one hand of more or less official secularization and the separation of Church and State in most countries, while on the other hand we see the emergence of a new power and influence of religion in those same countries.*

*In Christian, understanding there has been this fundamental instinct from the very inception of the life of the Church.*

*For instance, in the Letter to the Romans, Saint Paul reminds us that “nations, who do not possess the law, do instinctively what the law requires, these, though having no law, are a law unto themselves. They show that what the law requires is written on their hearts, to which their own conscience bears witness” (Roman 2:14-15).*

*Here in the Ukraine, you will understand this phenomenon better than many in our own time. For during the difficult years of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, religion survived, even under extreme difficulty and persecution. And since the collapse of totalitarianism, we see the forceful resurgence of religion in the region, and the importance that it clearly holds, not simply for the individual believer, but for the health and well-being of the society as a whole. For religion promotes good citizenship, as we have seen in former times such as the Byzantine Empire, where Church and State worked together in harmony and where there was a system of mutual synallegeia.*

*We know, for history has taught us, often painfully, that we have no right whatsoever to disregard the role of religion in human society, both as an individual and a collective reality. And we have learnt the truth of the words of the Holy Scriptures: “Man does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God” {Mt 4:4, Deut. 8:3}.*

*The longing of the human heart for communion with God is a universal experience, older even than human memory itself, and as we look to the common human destiny that we all share, may we understand afresh the urgency of the right relationship of religion in contemporary society. It has been acknowledged by science that man is not a biological entity only, but there is, as Saint Paul says, there is the “inner man,” that is the Spirit that dwells in him. For it is only on this path that human society will survive and flourish.*

*Thank you”.*