

# **ADDRESS OF THE HEADS OF THE GREEK ORTHODOX CHURCHES OF THE MIDDLE EAST TO THE PRESIDENT OF THE EUROPEAN COMMISSION MR. JOSE MANUEL BARROSO.**

Brussels, 17<sup>th</sup> of September 2012.

Your Excellency,

We would like first of all to thank you personally and your colleagues for receiving us in your office today.

We have come here in our capacity as the spiritual leaders of the Christians of the Middle East, including, of course, Cyprus.

The actual purpose of this visit to you, Mr. President, is to raise awareness and discuss the unpredictable situation of the Middle East Christians, who in fact constitute an inseparable part of the indigenous local and regional population.

We are profoundly concerned about the predicament of the many thousands of Syrian refugees, among them a great number of Christians, who have taken refuge in countries like Lebanon and Jordan, countries that are under our spiritual jurisdiction.

Needless to say that we have been actively engaged, as church leaders, in helping and alleviating the terrible plight of the refugees, without any discrimination.

We, as members of the Middle East Council of Churches, have

joined all our forces in order to financially and materially assist the refugees. For instance, a container of medical supplies, clothing and food from the Church of Cyprus is on the way to the Za' atari refugee camp, in Jordan.

Our Eastern Orthodox Church Middle East Office in Amman is fully operational in this respect.

Mr. President,

We are here to share with you our own experience and make our appeal to every person or organization of good will for the need of the Christian presence in the Middle East, especially in Syria, Lebanon, Jordan, Iraq and Palestine and, of course, let us not forget Egypt and Africa. It is already obvious that the Middle East and its broader area has turned into a volcano in progress.

Ours is the moral and religious responsibility to manage to defuse, if not to stop the explosion of this politically and to be more precise, religiously explosive situation. We stress this because this constitutes part and parcel of the various concrete initiatives that we have already undertaken.

We firmly believe that the European Union and other international bodies have the ability to intervene and to put an end to the unnecessary bloodshed of innocent people and to any form of violence that is taking place supposedly in the name of God.

In this regard, please allow us to suggest the following actions that should be considered; a) promotion of education through relevant projects, i.e. schools, Universities and Cultural Centers for the academic study of comparative religion, b) combating prejudice and bigotry and in many cases cultural and religious exclusiveness, which are the symptoms of polarization, discrimination and hatred against the other.

The mission of the Greek Orthodox Patriarchates/Churches of

the Middle East and Africa is of paramount importance, because our eastern Christianity does not bear the traces of imported and 'alien culture', that is to say Crusades and Colonialism. On the contrary, our compatriots and co-citizens have found us there. This is how we have culturally and historically grown up together. And this is why we reject the notion of 'Clash of Civilisations'. "

Once again, we would like to assure you, Mr. President, that we are willing and available, to cooperate with you and your services in working for peace and stability in our Middle East region and beyond.

His Beatitude

**THEOPHILOS III,**

Patriarch of Jerusalem