

H.B. SPEECH: "REMARKS ON THE MEANING & INTEGRITY OF THE HOLY PLACES".

Haifa, 15 October 2012

Your Excellency, Mr. President, Distinguished Fellow Religious Leaders, Ladies and Gentlemen,

"Jacob said... 'Surely the Lord is in this place... How awesome is this place! This is none other than the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven. ", (Gen. 28:16-17).

We to whom the joy, the privilege and the responsibility have been given to live in the Holy Land are the guardians and the servants of both sacred history and of a God-given heritage. This is a history and a heritage that belong to no one people or tradition exclusively, but to the whole of humanity.

The unique circumstances of the co-existence of Jew, Christian, and Muslim in our region are the necessary sign to the world that the Holy Land is the home of every human heart, and the sum of all human longing.

There can be no doubt of the love that we who live here have for this land and for the Holy Places that are the tangible evidence to us that God has chosen to dwell among us. For in this Holy Land, each of us can say with the patriarch Jacob, "This is none other than the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven."

We have Holy Places that are special to our respective communities of faith, and which we hold in special devotion. And there are Holy Places that we share, for in the sacred history of this region there are many ties that bind us.

Whether the Holy Sites are specific to our respective traditions, or whether they are shared among us, they demand from us all equal attentiveness and protection. We dwell together in this land, Jew, Christian and Muslim, and in consequence we share a common destiny: what affects one community affects us all, for good or ill.

The Holy Places remind us that our region can never be a place of simple tourism. It has always been, and must always continue to be, a place of genuine pilgrimage. Even the casual visitor does not leave unaffected by the Holy Places. Here there is still the breaking in of God into our human existence; here countless people of faith, as well as those of goodwill who profess no particular faith, come face to face with eternity, and are changed.

We know, Mr. President, of your care for and support of all the peoples of the Holy Land, and your commitment to respectful, peaceful co-existence. As we have faced recent and disturbing desecrations of Holy Sites recently, we urge you to do all in your power and in the power of the authorities, to support the communities who are the guardians and the servants of all our Holy Sites.

The hearts and minds of all our peoples are shaped by the strength of our leadership in both civic and religious life, and we know of your concern for the integrity of the precious heritage of our beloved Holy Land. The world looks to the Holy Land in hope, and in ensuring the well-being of our Holy Sites, we allow the divine light that shines from our land to reach the whole human family.

May God bless us all as we seek to be faithful to our callings. Thank you.

His Beatitude

THEOPHILOS III

Patriarch of Jerusalem.