

H.B. ADDRESS TO THE PRESIDENT OF ISRAEL & MEMBERS OF THE GOVERNMENT IN THE OCCASION OF THE NEW YEAR.

31 December 2012

Mr President,

Honourable Ministers,

Members of Parliament,

Your Eminences,

Dear Reverend Fathers,

Distinguished Guests,

“If any of you are qualified to be enrolled in our bodyguard, let them be enrolled, and let there be peace among us, (1 Mac. 13:40)

At the turn of the year, we greet you warmly in this season of renewal and hope, and we thank you for this opportunity to make these few remarks.

Events and gatherings such as this are of great importance both for celebrating the common bonds of our humanity, and for reminding ourselves of those fundamental values that are essential to our common life.

We are honored to be here with our fellow citizens of Jerusalem, and on behalf of the Christian Churches, the communities of Jerusalem, and all people of faith and good

will, we extend our best wishes to you and to the people of Israel for the New Year.

The Christian presence is part and parcel of the history of this region, and the ongoing life of the Churches ensures the sacred uniqueness of Jerusalem and the religious character of the Holy Land as a whole. Our region bears witness to the Abrahamic religions of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, and is a living testimony to inclusiveness, and, most importantly, to ethnic and religious diversity.

Our continued mission of being the Mother Church of the Holy Land, in fraternal relationship with our brothers and sisters of other Churches, strengthens our singular historical presence. Along with other Churches, the

Patriarchate of Jerusalem serves and safeguards the Holy Places and consequently we also serve and secure the Christian presence both in our region and in the wider Middle East.

New realities are emerging from the unpredictable political and socio-economic developments of our region. There is a clear need and desire for our experience to be both an anchor and a paradigm for this future that is in the making before our eyes. We in the Holy Land have a moral obligation to present to the rest of the region a path that leads to genuine freedom of religion, inter-religious engagement, and mutual respect, for we have a heritage of living and working together that is generations old. It is not an exaggeration to claim that the future of our world is inextricably bound up with the future that we build in the Holy Land for all our people.

Our shared history has taught us that the road to peace is a dynamic process, that is to say, that it is not through violence, but through dialogue. It is dialogue that builds trust and mutual acceptance, and that shows us the way forward. Time and again we say that we condemn violence wherever it occurs, and the Patriarchate as well as the other

Churches work whole-heartedly to build a lasting peace and security to which everyone, regardless of religious affiliation or cultural identity, is entitled.

Peace itself, the peace of which this Festive Season speaks and which we are all called to make, is not a single act. Peace involves the whole attitude and aspect of individuals, communities, and nations. It is a peace with and within the self, it is a peace with the whole created order, and it is a peace with one's fellow human beings. This sort of peace, which is in our Abrahamic traditions a reflection of the Divine, will always involve our complete, even sacrificial commitment. To paraphrase Saint Paul in the First Letter to the Corinthians, we can say this peace is a cause of our boasting (cf. 1 Cor. 9:15). For genuine peace to flourish we must lay aside every form of selfishness and fear. We must, as it is said in the Greek Scriptures, outdo one another in kenosis – in emptying ourselves for the sake of others.

The legitimate rights, privileges and the ancient customs of the Church and our communities, sanctioned by sacred history, must not be disregarded, for they constitute an integral part of the living communities of this Holy Land and beyond.

As difficult as it is to articulate, we cannot hide our concern at the attitude of certain groups that take the law into their own hands with the sole purpose to cause confusion and disturbance to the harmonious co-existence to which we all aspire.

Mr President, we commend you highly in your courageous position against sacrilegious acts that have been directed against the sacred gift of freedom of worship that we enjoy in our Holy Land. Your actions and stance in condemning strongly all forms of bigotry and prejudice against places of worship, be they Jewish, Christian, or Muslim, is a clear example for all leaders to follow.

With such great efforts in building bridges of genuine rapprochement between our various communities, together we can work to inspire trust not only within our Christian community as whole but also with non-Christian communities as well. Be it access to the Holy Places, ease of travel for the clergy, and the relationship between our Church communities and civic and governmental offices, we have every confidence that these matters can be enhanced and taken into serious consideration.

Your Excellency, on behalf of all our Christian brothers and sisters, we thank you for your cordial invitation and your courteous hospitality. We pray God's grace upon the approaching New Year: may the Divine Spirit of this Festive Season enlighten our minds, warm our hearts, and lead us all to work diligently for the fulfillment of the lives of all the citizens of the State of Israel.

For "without faith it is impossible to please God, whoever would approach him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him" (Hebrews 11:6).

We wish you, Mr. President, and all the people of our beloved City and Holy Land the blessings of this season and a peaceful New Year.

Thank you.

His Beatitude

Theophilos III

Patriarch of Jerusalem