

H. B. ADDRESS TO HIS EXCELLENCY VLADIMIR PUTIN THE PRESIDENT OF THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION-SOCHI (27-5-2013).

Sochi, 27 of May, 2013

Esteemed Vladimir Vladimirovitch,

Your Holiness,

Your Eminences,

Reverend Fathers,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Christ is risen! He is risen indeed!

Christos voskresiye! Vayistenu voskresiye!

It is a great honour for us to be received by you, Your Excellency, here in Moscow, and as we are here with you, we recall with great warmth your most recent visit to the Holy Land and to Jerusalem, when we welcomed you as a pilgrim to the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, the Church of the Nativity, and the Baptism Site in Jordan. The Holy Land has always held a special place in the hearts and imaginations of the Russian people, and we know of your commitment; and devotion.

Just as the light from the Holy Fire was brought to Russia just a short time ago at Pascha, so we bring with us the blessings and the light of the resurrection from the empty Tomb of our Lord Jesus Christ. For this light is the hope of the world.

We are here on our eirenicon – our visit of kinship to our

Sister Church of Russia – and we are also here to give spiritual encouragement to all the Russian peoples. The mission of the Church always faces great challenges, even in the best of circumstances, and we know that this is a time in which the religious traditions and moral values of the Holy Orthodox Church of Russia are under some pressure.

We come in our turn, as you know full well, from a region that is volatile and where many communities, among them Christian communities, face real danger. We remain steadfast in our mission to proclaim with all the means in our power the saving message of our faith, which is nothing less than the love and reconciliation of God. It is crucial for the integrity and the future of the Middle East that we maintain genuine mutual respect between faiths, cultures and ethnicities in our region.

We would like to assure you, Your Excellency, of our appreciation of your tireless efforts in defending Christian moral values and in supporting the Russian Orthodox Church as she works for the unity of the Russian peoples.

We appreciate deeply your concern for Jerusalem and the Holy Land, and we repeat our thanks to you for all that you have done on our behalf. We value your attention to help to contain those forces that threaten the peace and stability of the world, and especially of the Middle East. We know that you bear a heavy burden of leadership.

We know that you uphold the sacredness of Jerusalem by encouraging pilgrimages of the Russian people to the Holy Land. Pilgrimages are crucial for us, for they accomplish two things. On the one hand, pilgrimage to the Holy Land opens to the faithful and to others of goodwill the mystery of God and the reality of our sacred history. And on the other hand, pilgrimage also safeguards the Patriarchate, and encourages our local Palestinian Christian communities, spread across the Jurisdiction of the Patriarchate in Israel, Palestine, the

Hashemlthe Kingdom of Jordan, and Qatar, to know that they are not forgotten as they face huge challenges.

Thank you again for your warm welcome. Please allow us, in recognition of your leadership and your work on behalf of the Church in the Holy Land, to bestow on you the Order of the Holy Tomb. And we pray for Cod's blessing on you, your family, and on all the people of your beloved Russia.

Christ is risen! He is risen indeed! Christos voskresiye! Vayistenu voskresiye!

Thank you.

His Beatitude

Theophilos III

Patriarch of Jerusalem

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