

ILLEGAL ENTRY INTO CHAPEL OF GREEK ORTHODOX PATRIARCHATE ON HOLY SION HILL

On the evening of Friday the 25th of May/7th of June 2013, students at the Patriarchal-Hieratical School of the Patriarchate on the hill of the Holy Sion realized that unknown people had broken into the lock of the wrought iron door of the chapel-catacomb of the Pentecost, placed religious books and other items inside the chapel and closed it using a door chain and lock of their own.

The underground chapel was excavated by the late Timotheos, Patriarch of Jerusalem, and in addition to a few other occasions, it is also used on Whit Monday (Monday of the Holy Spirit) of each year for reading out one of the Pentecost-Kneeling Prayers during the litany from St Trinity Church to the grave of prophet-king David and the gallery.

Faced with this fact, students informed the Principal, the Venerable father Photios, who in his turn notified the Patriarchate. The Patriarchate called the Christian Affairs Division of the Israeli Ministry of Religious Affairs and the Israeli Police.

On Sunday morning, after the Divine Liturgy, the School Principal, father Photios and the Grand Chancellor Aristarchos, Archbishop of Constanina, arrived at the chapel and, guided by the Israeli Police, tried to remove the chain that had been placed on the door, in order to step inside. At that point, about ten extreme-religious Israelis, probably from the nearby Synagogue of the tomb of prophet-king David, arrived to protest, holding the Bible, reading and praying out loud, denying the Patriarchate's jurisdiction. They even obstructed the police from entering the chapel to remove the

items they had left inside. In the meantime, a religious woman, with her head covered, arrived at the scene and after fiercely reprimanding representatives of the Patriarchate and the Police, went on to cut a hole into the chapel's railing fence and, in the presence of the Police, allowed three young men with side curls to step inside.

Faced with these developments, the Grand Chancellor and the School Principal notified HB Theophilos, Our Father and Patriarchate of Jerusalem, now on a pastoral visit to Amman, Jordan, Mr Sezar Marzie, Head of the Christian Affairs Division of the Israeli Ministry of Religious Affairs, the Consultant on Christian Affairs at the Municipality of Jerusalem, Mr David Coren and the Consul-General of Greece to Israel, Mr Soteris Athanasiou. The latter arrived at the scene soon thereafter, together with the Patriarchate's Legal Consultants.

After approximately two hours and repeated efforts, the Police drove out, albeit unwilling and protesting, those who had arbitrarily trespassed to foreign property and to the Patriarchate's religious grounds with the intention of occupying and appropriating it. Their belongings were also removed, and the chapel was locked by means of keys kept at the School. Even so, the female protester went on to place a new chain with a lock on the door.

Subsequently, the Patriarchate's Legal Service together with the School Principal gave a statement to Jerusalem Police, submitting evidence of the Patriarchate's ownership of the site, with the aim of resolving the problem and reestablishing order.

The Patriarchate of Jerusalem condemns this illegal and unjust plot against its property, especially in this site of religious pilgrimage; it extends its thanks to the Israeli Police for their support on the hill of the Holy Sion, without prejudice to its right to continue its efforts to fully

resolve the problem.

From the Secretariat-General

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