

# ADDRESS OF WELCOME TO H.E. BIDZINA IVANISHVILI, PR. MINISTER OF GEORGIA.

*Holy City of Jerusalem, 25 June 2013.*

*Your Excellency, Mr. Prime Minister,*

*Madame Khvedelidze,*

*Esteemed Members of your Delegation,*

*Your Eminences,*

*Reverend Fathers,*

*Ladies and Gentlemen,*

We welcome you, Your Excellency, on this, your first visit to our Patriarchate as you visit Jerusalem, the Holy Land, and the State of Israel. It is our prayer that your trip may be as much a spiritual one as a political one, and that you may find refreshment as you visit the Holy Places.

Your visit here is of considerable significance both for the Georgian people as well as for the peoples of our region, especially the Christian community of the Holy Land. The Patriarchate of Jerusalem, the Mother of All the Churches, is the most ancient, continuous, religious institution in the Holy Land, and has a deep and historic relationship with the Georgia.

It is Saint Nina, Equal to the Apostles and the Enlightener of Georgia, who, according to the tradition, is the link between us. A relative of Saint George and a niece of Patriarch Juvenal of Jerusalem, as a young woman Saint Nina set out from this city and eventually found her way to Georgia. There she

healed and converted Queen Nana, after which the country received the Christian faith, and became one of the earliest Christian nations. As a consequence, throughout the centuries the Church of Jerusalem and the Church of Georgia have enjoyed close ties.

The Patriarchate of Jerusalem occupies a unique position, and carries out a particular mission, on behalf of the Christians of this region, and on behalf of Christians from all over the world. As the servant and guardian of the Holy Places, the Patriarchate guarantees the Christian character of Jerusalem and the Holy Land, and ensures that the Holy Places remain accessible to pilgrims and people of good will without distinction.

The Patriarchate is a point of special reference for Orthodox Christians; Jerusalem is at the heart of our Orthodox faith because the Holy Places are near and dear to every Orthodox Christian. Thousands of pilgrims come here every year, and are a reminder of the beautiful words of Psalm 41:

***“As the deer longs for flowing streams, so my soul longs for you, O God.***

***My soul thirsts for God, for the living God”, (Ps. 41; 1 -2).***

Here pilgrims encounter sacred history made real, and derive spiritual refreshment from their devotions at the Holy Places.

For Orthodox Christians, the Patriarchate of Jerusalem also stands as a unique witness to the unity of the One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church. Our Oneness is fully expressed and demonstrated here, as we gather under our wings, Orthodox Christians from all over the world. Here indeed we live the spirit of the Feast of Pentecost that we are currently celebrating, as those who enjoy full and complete unity and at the same time rejoice in our cultural, linguistic, and national diversity. An essential part of our mission is to embody and preserve this unity in diversity.

You are most welcome, Your Excellency, and we wish you every success in your mission to our region. In token of the close historic and spiritual ties that bind the Patriarchate of Jerusalem to Georgia, we would like to bestow on you the Cross of the Order of the Holy Sepulchre. With it, come our fraternal greetings to our brother, His Beatitude Patriarch Elias, and our prayers for all the people of your beloved country.

Thank you.

His Beatitude

**THEOPHILOS III**

Patriarch of Jerusalem