

HIS BEATITUDE ADDRESS OF WELCOME TO HIS EXCELLENCY TRAIAN BASESCU THE PRESIDENT OF ROMANIA.

Jerusalem Patriarchate, 20 January 2014

Mr. President,

Respected Members of your Delegation,

Your Eminences,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is a great honour for us to welcome you to the Holy Land and to our Patriarchate of Jerusalem, which is the Mother of all the Churches. Most especially we are pleased that you are here during this festive season in which the Church celebrates the Feasts of the Nativity and the Theophany of our Lord Jesus Christ, the time of the revelation of the True Light that enlightens all peoples (cf. Lk 2:32). We welcome you as a pilgrim and as a faithful son of our Holy Orthodox Church, which has such deep roots in the history of your nation and people.

The Patriarchate of Jerusalem is the embodiment of our sacred history, and, as you know well, Your Excellency, the Patriarchate, together with the Brotherhood of the Holy Tomb, have been entrusted by Divine Providence from the earliest days of the Church with the spiritual mission to be guardians and servants of the Holy Places. In this way we understand

that we do not represent ourselves alone, but the whole Orthodox world, and we rejoice that so many pilgrims come from your country for the deep refreshment of the soul that so many find here. Indeed as Orthodox Christians from Romania they are able to participate fully in the worship and religious festivals of the Holy Places.

Moreover, Jerusalem holds a unique place in the human imagination, and the Patriarchate ensures that all those who wish to have access to the Holy Places are able to do so, including many Jewish and Muslim pilgrims, in addition to Christians of many confessions.

This is the responsibility that is laid upon us because of our unique position in the Holy Land. The Patriarchate of Jerusalem enjoys the full respect and recognition of the three political authorities of this region – the State of Israel, the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan, and the State of Palestine – and this legal status is clear and safe-guarded. The Patriarchate serves as the representative leader of all the Christian communities of the Holy Land, and is the principal Christian institution that can speak on behalf of the unique integrity of the status of Jerusalem. In this important work we know that we can count on the support of the faithful of Romania.

On the occasion of your visit, Your Excellency, we recall with gratitude the close relationship that has long existed between the Patriarchate of Jerusalem and the people of Romania. It was in 1682 that our esteemed predecessor, Patriarch Dositheos, established the first printing press in any Orthodox country, publishing in the great cultural city of Lași important theological and liturgical books. We are united by important bonds of faith and affection which we must always be careful to foster and deepen.

We wish you, Mr. President, every success in your mission to our region, and we ask you to convey to your beloved nation

and people our Patriarchal greetings and blessing. And in recognition of the close historic and spiritual relationship between the Patriarchate of Jerusalem and Romania, we wish to bestow upon you the decoration of the Great Cross of the Holy Tomb.

We thank you for your visit.

His Beatitude

THEOPHILOS III

Patriarch of Jerusalem