THE STATEMENT OF THE PILGRIMAGE COMMITTEE FOR THE SERVICE OF THE HOLY LIGHT.

His Beatitude

Our Father and Patriarch of Jerusalem

Theophilos III

And His Holy and Sacred Synod

Jerusalem

Your Beatitude,

We, the undersigned members of the *Status Quo* Committee, the Chief Dragoman His Eminence Metropolitan of Eleftheropolis Christodoulos, the Chief Secretary His Eminence Archbishop of Constantina Aristarchos, the Secretary of the Holy and Sacred Synod His Eminence Archbishop of Lydda Dimitrios and the Superior of the Church of the Holy Sepulcher His Eminence Archbishop of Ierapolis Isidoros, proceed in due respect to report to Your Beatitude and the Holy and Sacred Synod about the ceremony of the Holy Fire during the Great Saturday of the current year 2013.

To begin with, we would like to clarify that from the ritual point of view and the *Status Quo* order the ceremony was performed exactly without any lack or deviation.

Our cooperation in our capacity as members of the *Status Quo* Committee together with the representatives of the Israeli Police in Jerusalem, i.e. the Director of the Jaffa Gate Police Department Mr. Bareket, and his cooperators Mr. Avi,

Mr. Johnny, Mr. Alex and Mr. Rafi, was very good, during the days before the great Saturday and also during the Holy Fire Ceremony. We don't have any complaint about the above mentioned Police representatives.

In spite of the above positive elements which we report here, there were incidents of negative behaviour of the Policemen who were on duty at the blockages. This means for us that these policemen were not obeying the orders they had received.

We report these incidents not in order to criticize the Police but in order not to have them repeated next year.

First, we refer to the episode of the violation of the room of deacon Fr. Dionysios inside the Church of the Holy Sepulchre and his violent expulsion from it, and his keys confiscated and then returned to him. This happened immediately after the ceremony of Epitaphios on Good Friday. The Police apologized for this behaviour.

We refer also to the fact that several Greek female pilgrims, as they reported to us, were ousted from the Church of the Holy Sepulchre at the same night of Holy Friday after the ceremony of the Epitaphios, and were brought to the area of Jaffa Gate and were left there closed, between the barriers, without water or even the possibility of bodily necessity until 4:00 pm of the Great Saturday, after the performance of the Holy Fire Ceremony.

Within the framework of the cooperation between the Chief Secretary's Office and the Police, the Police was informed about the number and the place of dwelling of the Greek pilgrims and it was agreed that the Greek pilgrims would have the possibility of free movement at about 4:00 a.m. of the Holy Saturday in order to go and hear prayers and have Holy Communion in the Churches of St. Panteleimon near the "Gloria" Hotel, St. Theodoros near 'Casa Nova" Hotel, Megali Panagia-Der —Il- Banat Monastery opposite the Coptic Khan and in the church of Virgin Mary "Saydanaya" opposite the "Hanque" Mosque.

Unfortunately, these arrangements were not kept. The Chief Secretary, going to the Church of "Saydanaya" for the liturgy at 4;00 a.m. of the Great Saturday, was prevented by a policewoman and could pass only after an intensive quarrel. Also, in front of the door of the Church of St. Constantine and Helen, Police put a blockage without any reason and a policewoman prevented from entrance Metropolitan of Neapolis Amvrosios, Metropolitan of Thabor Methodios and Metropolitan of Vostra Timothy. Police closed pilgrims in this church and didn't allow them to go out. With all this, we think that it is reasonable to ask why are we prevented from proceeding to the prayer on one of the holiest days of Christianity and inside our Convent itself.

In addition the Police didn't also keep its promises to facilitate the collective proceeding of the Greek pilgrims to the Church of the Holy Sepulchre. There were pilgrims who entered, being accompanied by a policeman, but the great majority of them were prevented and were enclosed on the terrace of our Central Convent. Greek pilgrims who were concentrated according to the instructions of the Police also outside the Convent of Megali Panagia- Der-Il-Banat remained there waiting until 11:00 a.m. or even until the hour when the Patriarch had already descended to the Holy Sepulchre and were not allowed to enter the Church. At the same time we are glad to say that Russian Pilgrims were entering from Muristan area speedily and without any obstacle.

The Chief Secretary, being accompanied by the policeman Johnny Kasabri, led after the Holy Liturgy on Holy Saturday in Saydanaya about 350 pilgrims through the Street of St. Francis and Hotel "Casa Nova" to the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate's Road. There a group of the Civil Police disagreed with the police and came and fell upon the pilgrims like upon a herd and divided them into two groups, prevented most of them from entering the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate and left them there outside.

So far it concerns the VIP cards, granted by the Patriarchate, it was agreed with the Police that they would allow free access to the Church of the Holy Sepulchre for their bearers. They were signed by the Police. According to the Police demand

they were printed with a special Logo of the Patriarchate so that nobody could forge them. Also according to the Police demand it was written on these cards that their bearers dwelling outside the OldCity should proceed through the New Gate. In spite of this, there were people, holding these cards, who were prevented to proceed to the Church of the Holy Sepulchre. As an example of such a treatment concerning the cards, we refer to the fact that the Chief Secretary according to the suggestion of Mr. Avi Biton, asked the policeman Dani, responsible for the terrace area of St. Constantine, to allow to three pilgrims holding these cards to pass and he refused. Complaints about this treatment were made to His Beatitude the Patriarch Himself.

The headmaster of our school teacher and monk Fr. Fotios was descending from the road of the Hotel Casa Nova to the Patriarchate. He asked something of the Policeman on this street and he pushed him violently.

We are sorry to say that the policemen at the blockages were hostile to us and not helpful. On the contrary the Junior Policemen, whose names were mentioned at the beginning, were kind and helpful. It seems that there was no coordination between the leadership of the Police and their staff.

We report all these, objectively and without any prejudice, and we ask that our report be notified to the Police and be considered and used properly, so that next year we can have better treatment by the Police as in last year 2012. This way there will not be bitterness and complaints in the souls of the Greek pilgrims but relief and pleasure and they will proceed in the feast of Easter for the benefit of the Holy Shrines and of the State of Israel.

Having reported all this, we remain,

In Jerusalem, May 14th, 2013

With respect and love in the Lord,

The members of the Status Quo Committee,

CHRISTODOULOS

Metropolitan of Eleftheropolis, Chief Dragoman.

ARISTARCHOS

Archbishop of Constantina, Chief Secretary.

DIMITRIOS

Archbishop of Lydda, Secretary of the Holy and Sacred Synod.

ISIDOROS

Archbishop of Ierapolis, Superior of the Holy Sepulchre.