

ADDRESS OF H.B. PATRIARCH THEOPHILOS III TO MR. PLAMEN ORESHARSKI, PRIME MINISTER OF BULGARIA.

Jerusalem, 20 of May 2014

Your Excellency, Mr. Prime Minister Plamen Oresharski,

It is with great joy that we welcome you and the distinguished members of your delegation today, during the Paschal period, here in Jerusalem and to our Patriarchate. The Patriarchate of Jerusalem is considered to be the Mother of all Churches, for Jerusalem has been the wellspring of our Christian faith and our common Orthodox traditions, i.e. the values that we share together with the Orthodox Church and the people of Bulgaria.

You are here on a state visit to Israel; however, for us your visit is considered a pilgrimage to the holy places, more specifically to the Church of the Anastasis, which encompasses the crucifixion and burial site, i.e. the tomb, of our Lord Jesus Christ. The Patriarchate of Jerusalem, together with the order of the Brotherhood of the Holy Tomb, has been entrusted by Our Lord the guardianship and service of those holy places, which attract thousands of pilgrims every day of the year. Needless to say, the majority of these pilgrims come from Orthodox countries, including of course, your own beloved country of Bulgaria.

In saying this, we would like to emphasize the fact that our common Orthodox Christian faith and heritage serves as a point

of unity between our Orthodox people and nations, and as a bridge of reconciliation. We are saying this because first of all, we here do not represent ourselves – we represent the Orthodox Church as a whole and Christendom. Secondly, the mission of the Patriarchate is and has remained throughout the ages, a purely religious and spiritual one, which promotes peaceful coexistence, mutual respect, and understanding between the various religious communities.

Furthermore, the mission of the Patriarchate has been to protect the existing political and diplomatic Status Quo of Jerusalem, in which Jerusalem is equally sacred and holy to the three monotheistic religions, i.e. Judaism, Christianity and Islam.

Mr. Prime Minister, your pilgrimage here is not only a blessing for you and your countrymen, it is a blessing for the Holy Land; for every pilgrim is regarded as a messenger of good will and a messenger of peace and reconciliation, which is so greatly needed in this region and for the broader area of the blood-soaked Middle East.

Allow us to take this opportunity to confer upon you the honor of the Cross of the Order of the Holy Tomb of Christ in appreciation of your commitment to the wellbeing of your country and for the peace of the world. Let this be a sign of communion between the Bulgarian people and the Church of Jerusalem. You are welcome and God bless you.

His Beatitude

THEOPHILOS III

Patriarch of Jerusalem.