

# **HIS BEATITUDE ADDRESS AT THE ANNUAL NEW YEAR RECEPTION FOR THE MUNICIPALITY OF JERUSALEM, HOSTED BY THE MAYOR OF JERUSALEM.**

28 January 2015

Mr Mayor,  
Distinguished Members of the Municipal Government,  
Your Eminences,  
Your Graces,  
Respected Leaders of our Civic organizations,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,

We greet you, Mr. Mayor, and the leaders of our Municipality, in this joyous season of light at the beginning of the New Year, and in this season of light we recall that light was the first element of creation:

In the beginning when God created the heavens and the earth, the earth was a formless void and darkness covered the face of the deep, while the Spirit of God swept over the face of the waters. Then God said, "Let there be light;" and there was light."

(Gen. 1:1-3)

The light of creation is a reflection to us of the uncreated light that shines from God himself. This is the great light that we celebrate during this festive season, the light that shines from God into the hearts of all people of good will. As the faithful of the Abrahamic traditions in this Holy City and in our Holy Land, we know of the power of the uncreated light

to illumine the darkness of the human soul and the darkness of a world torn by prejudice, violence, war, and persecution.

As those who live in and love this Holy City of Jerusalem, ours is a special responsibility. At the centre of the life of Jerusalem is our long tradition of co-existence, and the truth that the identity of Jerusalem is founded not on one tradition or religious group alone. The integrity of Jerusalem, both historically and religiously, depends on the well-being of Jew, Christian, and Muslim here in our midst. Jerusalem is home to all, and depends on all.

As we enter this New Year, we who are the Heads of the Christian Churches of the Holy Land make crystal clear again our opposition to all forms of violence, persecution, and acts of terror, especially those that occur in our region. Lasting peace and reconciliation are never achieved by such means, and it is the responsibility of both our civic and religious leadership not simply to condemn violence, but to show a different way forward to peace.

In our efforts to build a society based on mutual respect, peace, reconciliation and justice, we have come to know the power of dialogue. Dialogue does not ignore difficulty; it faces difficulty squarely, but respectfully. Dialogue does not mean that we must relinquish our values; it enables us to see the values that the other is trying to uphold. Dialogue reveals pathways that we had not yet previously understood to exist.

It is no accident that historic meetings of reconciliation are held in Jerusalem. For Jerusalem has the power to gather and unite the human family, even across historic divisions. Our responsibility as civic and religious leaders here is to ensure that nothing diminishes or stands in the way of the God-given power of Jerusalem to be a home for all.

As we know, the Status Quo is an essential part of the fabric

that ensures the true nature of Jerusalem as a home for all, and it is our duty to ensure that the rights and privileges of all are safe-guarded as we are faithful to the expectations that the existing Status Quo lays upon us. The civil authority has a special role here, particularly in guaranteeing freedom of access to the faithful and to pilgrims to the Holy Places, not least at the time of the Great Feasts.

We appreciate the difficulties of seeing to the safety of large numbers of people, and we are grateful to you especially, Mr. Mayor, for the personal attention that you have given to us and to the Christian community in this very area. But we also urge the Municipality to be assiduous in finding new and better ways to maintain freedom of movement in the Old City and in our neighborhoods.

The Heads of the Christian Churches continue to pledge ourselves to our commitment to support all who have the care of Jerusalem. In spite of our own historic cultural identities, we are united in our love of and our diakonia—that is, our service – to this Holy City. As we join with you, Mr. Mayor, to welcome the New Year, we welcome the season of light with a renewed commitment to the vocation of Jerusalem to shine as a beacon to the whole world.

We wish you, Mr. Mayor and our respected leaders of this Municipality, every success in your work on behalf of all. May God bless the Holy City of Jerusalem, all who live here, and all who come here as pilgrims for spiritual nurture and refreshment.

Happy New Year! Hag sammeach!

Thank you.

His Beatitude  
**THEOPHILOS III**

Patriarch of Jerusalem