

HIS BEATITUDE SPEECH ON THE OCCASION OF THE COMMEMORATION OF THE ARMENIA GENOCIDE.

24 April 2015

Your Beatitude Patriarch Nourhan,

Your Eminences,

Your Graces,

Beloved Members of our Respective Brotherhoods,

Dear Members of the Armenian Community of the Holy Land,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

We gather on this solemn occasion to remember one of the great atrocities of the 20th century – a century that was marked by many horrendous acts of man’s inhumanity to man. What the world calls the Armenian Genocide, you call in your own language the “Great Crime,” and the memory of this crime has marked the soul of the Armenian people around the world.

Today we pray first for the victims of this terrible policy of extermination. May their memories be eternal, and may their witness be an inspiration. The Armenian community lost many of its greatest intellectuals and leaders, as well as other innocent men, women and children in this action, and indeed many of those who today call Jerusalem and the Holy Land their home are here because of being displaced from their former homes.

But this is a commemoration in which the Rum Orthodox Patriarchate of Jerusalem also shares in a special way. For during the Ottoman persecution that was so devastating to the Armenian community, thousands of Pontos Greeks and Assyrians in the former Ottoman Empire also suffered death and exile. We therefore partake in your grief and remember a time that was so devastating to so many of our respective communities and in our region. For as Saint Paul says, "If one part suffers, every part suffers with it; if one part is honoured, every part rejoices with it" (1 Cor. 12:26).

This commemoration reminds us once again that the age of prejudice and persecution has not ended. In our own day, and in our own region, people are still persecuted, terrorized, exiled, and martyred for their ethnic identity and religious affiliation. Our sadness on this occasion must be tempered by vigilance and resolve. Today's commemoration is a stark reminder to us that we must always condemn persecution, violence, and terrorism in any form, and to promote respect for all human life, especially as we all share a common human nature and a common destiny.

We assure you and your community, Your Beatitude, of our special prayers today for the victims of this atrocity, and we pray for a deepening of the spirit of mutual respect among peoples of different ethnicities and religious traditions, both in our region and around the world. Our common work and witness to the Light that shines from the Holy Tomb during this Holy Season of Pascha is our most powerful weapon against the forces of darkness and evil in our world. For as Saint Paul says, "Our battle is not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places" (Eph. 6:12).

May God bless you, Your Beatitude, the Brotherhood of Saint James, and all the people of the Armenian community in Jerusalem and the Holy Land.

Christ is Risen!

His Beatitude

THEOPHILOS III

Patriarch of Jerusalem