

PROGRESS OF DELIBERATIONS AT GREEK FOREIGN MINISTRY'S PEACE CONFERENCE (PART II)

His Beatitude Theodore, Patriarch of Alexandria, then took the floor, congratulating the Greek Foreign Minister for organizing the Conference. The Church, said Patriarch Theodore, was founded two thousand years ago in order to find man; this had been the fruit of the Church's ecumenical spirit. Today, the Church proclaims the supranational message of Christianity which, albeit self-evident, has been reduced to an inaccessible endeavour. Religion has unfortunately become a factor of division and discord, instead of agreement and coexistence. Politics should not be religionized and religion should not be politicized, Patriarch Theodore said. Jesus Christ has not only taught tolerance, but above all He taught love, even for one's enemy, citing the example of the Samaritan man who proved that the concept of "neighbour" is not confined to our compatriots but transcends this limit to include any man of any religion, race, language or nationality. Europe owes to provide help to the Middle East and the African continent, the continent of the future. The Patriarch of Alexandria closed with the words of the Blessed Augustine, that faith is to believe what you can't see and the reward is to see what you believed in.

Patriarch Theophilos of Jerusalem spoke next in English, see link:

<https://en.jerusalem-patriarchate.info/2015/10/19/17559>

Mr Kotzias thanked the Patriarch of Alexandria for indicating that for the fruits of peace, justice and prosperity to become ripe, tolerance is not enough; respect and love for the fellow man are also required.

The Egyptian Foreign Minister, Mr Sameh Shoukry, then took the floor. Mr Shoukry referred to the collaboration between Greece and Egypt, and the friendship between the two peoples, before pointing out that the intensified crisis in the Middle East has caused insecurity, which in its turn has led to crimes committed by religious dogmatists, extreme groups proclaiming intolerance and hatred. Muslims, Mr Shoukry said, have fallen victims of dogmatists too. Religious pluralism in the Middle East must be proclaimed. The Al-Azhar Mosque proclaims that any attempt to impose one religion over another should be penalized. Suppressing a religion and oppressing a people are factors that yield violence. In closing, the Minister said that he considers the Conference the starting point for a joint approach against violent situations in the Middle East.

Patriarch John of Antioch spoke next, pointing out that according to the Acts of the Apostles, Antioch was where the first disciples of Christ were called "Christians". The See of the Patriarchate of Antioch lies a few kilometres away from where deathly shells are fired. He added that the Arab Spring has destroyed centuries-long Churches and mosques and cultural monuments. In Antioch and across the whole of Syria, he said, churches and mosques stand side by side. The immigration of the Syrians is not the solution to the problem. "We do not consider ourselves subservient, nor a minority", said Patriarch John, and went on to appeal for the liberation of two Hierarchs abducted three years ago. In closing, the Patriarch referred to the coexistence of Christians and Muslims in Antioch that should guide the rest of us towards a harmonious coexistence in the future. We appeal for love, he said, and for you to allow our people to go on living in their ancestral homes.

In response to the speech of the Patriarch of Antioch, Mr Kotzias declared his support to the sufferings of the Syrian people.

From the Secretariat-General

