

ADDRESS OF HIS BEATITUDE THEOPHILOS III PATRIARCH OF JERUSALEM TO THE MEETING OF THE EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE OF THE M.E.C.C. IN CAIRO.

3–4 November 2015

Your Beatitude,

Your Eminences,

Your Graces,

Beloved Pastors,

Sisters and Brothers,

We greet you in the name of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, and we bring you the greetings of your Christian sisters and brothers of the Holy Land. At this time of deepening crisis in the Middle East, Christians from every Church and community are united in suffering, and as we come to Egypt, where there have been many sacrifices, we wish to express our solidarity with you.

As we meet in the Executive Committee, we wish to emphasize some issues that we have mentioned before, both to the Middle East Council of Churches and to other meetings.

First we must always do our best to ensure that, as the Leaders of the Churches and Christian communities of the Middle East, we are united. We cannot allow any difference or

spirit of rivalry to infect our common witness and common mission. In so many parts of our region, Christians are at risk of violence, persecution, death and exile and no persecutor is concerned with any distinctions.

As the Leadership of the Middle East Council of Churches, therefore, we must show a united front, and ensure that this united front is the sign of united action on behalf of all our faithful. We can, and we must, speak with one voice, so that people both at the Middle East and around the World see that we are working together to stop the horrific crimes that are happening to so many innocent people and that we are also working together to support and care for all those who are in any kind of need.

We recognize a special role for the Christian Leaders here in defending the Christians in this country. Egypt boasts a noble Christian civilization that goes back to the earlier centuries of the Church. Here Christianity came very early from the Holy Land, and here the first ascetics moved to the desert, where the monastic tradition flourishes to this day. Here in modern times, in addition to the Coptic Church, there are the Rum Orthodox, Roman Catholics, as well as the Anglican diocese, the groups of Protestants, all of them indigenous communities of Egyptian Christians. We in the Middle East Council of Churches wish to reassure the Church leaders of our support and encouragement in their pastoral concern for all Christians in this country.

While the Middle East Council of Churches must speak with one voice and help to lead in the service of the Christian communities of the region, we must also be in a willing partner with all people of good will, including Muslim leadership, in opposing extremism and violence, and in securing peaceful co-existence. Ours is a region in which peoples of different faiths, cultures and ethnicities have been able to live side by side for centuries and this rich cultural diversity must be restored and even strengthened for

the well-being of all.

In addition to this, the Middle East Council of Churches must continue to find ways to help the displaced and persecuted at the local level in a range of practical ways. Our relationships with Churches and non-governmental organizations outside our region are crucial. We have an obligation to enable our local communities to work in mature, organized ways and to create effective partnerships between our local communities and those outside our region, who have the capacity and the willingness to make a difference. The existence of many thousands of people in the Middle East worsens with each passing day, and they need specific assistance, from decent accommodation to health care, to education to job training.

As we look to the future, we are planning our next General Assembly. This will be a decisive meeting, and many eyes will be on us, as we respond to the current situation. This meeting will have two sections, the first, the General Assembly itself at which the Secretary General will be elected, and the second the regional and Ecumenical Church Leaders Summit.

We propose and believe that this meeting should take place in a suitable environment, such as the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan. Because of its importance and the large number of people both from our region and around the world who will need to be in attendance, we consider that Jordan provides the most convenient location. In the present state of conflict, Jordan continues to be the country in which it is easiest for all the Middle Eastern leadership to gather, and it is important that we meet in the region and not outside the region if this is at all possible.

We are pleased to say that we have secured the support of His Majesty King Abdullah II for such a gathering, and we have also managed to secure the necessary funding for the meeting to take place in Amman. We encourage the Executive Committee

to support the choice of Amman as the site for the Next General Assembly.

Dear Sisters and Brothers,

we face a critical time both for the Middle East Council of Churches and our region. We to whom the leadership of the Churches has been entrusted by divine providence must not shrink from taking decisive action to support an active and vibrant Christian presence in the Middle East and to oppose violence and discrimination of any kind against any individual or community.

We are living witnesses of great risks and immeasurable costs. Too many lives are been lost, too many communities dispersed, too many ancient and Holy Places destroyed. This cannot continue, and the eyes of the world look to us for responsible Christian leadership.

May God bless our common task at this meeting and may God bless all those who are working to bring peace and reconciliation to our region. As we remember the words of our Lord Jesus Christ from the Sermon of the Mount:

Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.

Blessed are the merciful, for they will receive mercy.

Blessed are the pure in heart: for they will see God.

Blessed are the peacemakers: for they will be called children of God.

Blessed are they who are persecuted for righteousness' sake: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. (Matthew 5:6– 10)

Thank you.

His Beatitude

THEOPHILOS III

Patriarch of Jerusalem.