

ADDRESS OF WELCOME TO HIS EXCELLENCY KLAUS IOHANNIS THE PRESIDENT OF ROMANIA TO THE PATRIARCHATE OF JERUSALEM.

7 March 2016

Your Excellency Mr. President,

Respected Members of the Romanian Delegation,

Your Eminences,

Your Graces,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

We welcome you warmly, Your Excellency, to the Holy City of Jerusalem and to the Rum Orthodox Patriarchate of Jerusalem. You come among us as a peacemaker to a land that is thirsty for peace, and we assure you of our prayers for your mission.

As the oldest religious institution in the Holy Land, the Patriarchate is a witness to sacred history, and also the guardian and the servant of the Holy Places. We have endeavored down the ages to protect and sustain the Holy Places as places of worship that are accessible to all without discrimination. Jerusalem is very dear to the entire world, and to this Holy City we welcome you as a pilgrim, just as we welcomed your predecessor, His Excellency, former President Basescu, in 2014.

Your visit renews and deepens the warm relationship that has existed between the Patriarchate of Jerusalem and the Romanian

people for centuries. Our predecessors, in particular Patriarch Dositheos II and Patriarch Chrysanthos, had a special pastoral devotion to the region now known as Romania; and we also rejoice in the fact that the earlier principalities that now form the modern state of Romania gave great moral and material support to the Patriarchate in the struggle to protect the Holy Places.

The Patriarchate receives many pilgrims from Romania every year, and we are pleased that a fraternal and canonical relationship exists today between our Churches. The Patriarchate of Jerusalem has been entrusted with the care of all Orthodox Christians who live in or visit the Holy Land, and we take this pastoral responsibility extremely seriously. This is our ecumenical vocation to the Orthodox Church.

A visible sign of this close relationship was the recent canonization of the Romanian Saint John the New Chozibite at the monastery in Wadi Qelt. The presence of the relics of Saint John in the monastery of Saint George are a deep spiritual bond between the Church of Jerusalem and the Romanian people.

Furthermore, your visit is an encouragement for the Christian presence in the Holy Land and throughout the Middle East. As Your Excellency is well aware, the Christian presence is of paramount importance to the integrity of the cultural and religious landscape of the region. The Christian presence is also fundamental in preserving the Christian character of Jerusalem.

We congratulate you, Your Excellency, on your recent election as President, and we assure you of our best wishes and prayers for the work that lies ahead of you in this weighty office. In token of our appreciation and in recognition of the intimate relationship between the Patriarchate of Jerusalem and Romania, we would like to bestow on you the decoration of the Grand Cross of the Holy Sepulcher.

May God bless all the people of your beloved country.

Thank you.

His Beatitude

THEOPHILOS III

Patriarch of Jerusalem