

# **HIS BEATITUDE ADDRESS AT THE MEETING OF THE STEERING COMMITTEE FOR THE RESTORATION WORK OF THE SACRED EDICULE OF THE HOLY SEPULCHER.**

Your Excellency Father Francesco,

Your Beatitude Patriarch Nourhan,

Your Eminences,

Dr Moropoulou and the Respected Members of the Scientific Team,

Esteemed Delegates of the World Monuments Fund, Beloved Members of our respective Brotherhoods, Ladies and Gentlemen,

We welcome you to the Patriarchate of Jerusalem, and to this important meeting in the ongoing work of the restoration of the Sacred Edicule. We have gathered today the steering committee in order to evaluate the progress of the work so far, and to shape a strategy for the work ahead that will be based on the actual data that has so far been collected as well as the resultant judgments and concerns of the experts.

They have confirmed what they had foreseen in their explorations, especially in their investigation with non-destructive endoscopic cameras and other state-of-the-art scientific methods. Now the work of our experts is focused on the critical area of the eastern part of the Sacred Edicule

where the Copts hold their rites.

We are thankful to our Lord who has given our three Communities the grace us to understand that we have a common mission is to protect and guard this holy place primarily as a place of worship. We have seen a remarkable spirit of collaboration between the three Communities of the Rum Orthodox Patriarchate, the Franciscan Custody, and the Armenian Patriarchate in our joint focus on the urgency of this project.

This is good in itself, and is a sign to the world of hope and unity. We have been entrusted by Divine Providence with the responsibility to be the guardians and the servants of the Holy Places, and our collaboration in this project represents the fruit of this faithful diakonia.

We have tried our best so far to facilitate first that the usual religious services of our Communities that take place in the Edicule have been able to proceed as normal. At the same time we have maintained access for pilgrims even during work hours. We assure everyone that services will continue throughout the project, and we are clear that the existing Status Quo will not be changed or altered in any way. This is of crucial significance, as we are not restoring a monument; we are preserving a place of worship, where worship must continue even as restoration takes place.

We must also thank the National Technical University of Athens and the team of experts under the direction of Professor Antonia Moropoulou. Their scientific report is the firm basis for the present restoration work, and is a significant advance in our knowledge of this holy site.

We would like to take this opportunity to express formally our appreciation to a number of people and groups who are contributing to this project.

First, we wish to acknowledge our gratitude to His Majesty

King Abdullah II of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan for his leadership and significant support of this restoration.

The Government of the Hellenic Republic has given important support to this project in many ways, and we acknowledge the contribution of the Athen's Bank of Attika and many others.

We wish to thank the management of Aegean Airlines, who are making the regular visits of the team from Athens possible by the generous donation of airline tickets.

The World Monuments Fund has been extremely helpful to this project, and we are deeply grateful for the generosity of many donors of funds who are making this work possible, including His Majesty King Abdullah II, Mrs Mica Ertegun, and individuals and groups from many Churches and Christian communities here and around the world. The restoration of the Sacred Edicule, itself a sign of hope to the whole world, has become a project of the whole world.

In addition to these notes of gratitude, we feel obliged to mention clearly that that the funds that are coming in for the project come to a specific account and to a specific office which administers the funds solely for this purpose. All funds that are donated for this restoration are going to this project, and this project alone.

May God prosper this work, and may God bless all those who are charged with its successful completion.

Thank you.

His Beatitude

**THEOPHILOS III**

Patriarch of Jerusalem

