

REMARKS OF HIS BEATITUDE THE PATRIARCH OF JERUSALEM AT THE OFFICIAL RECEPTION IN CELEBRATION OF THE 170TH ANNIVERSARY OF MISSIA IN JERUSALEM

Notre Dame Hotel, 22/10/2017

“Your Eminence Metropolitan Juvenalii,

Your Eminences,

Your Graces,

Dear Archimandrite Alexander,

Respected Members of Governmental Agencies and the Diplomatic
Service,

Reverend Fathers,

Beloved Monastics,

Sisters and Brothers in the Lord,

Ladies and Gentlemen

We wish to send our Patriarchal greetings to this festal gathering on the occasion of the 170th anniversary of the Russian Ecclesiastical Mission in Jerusalem. As we do so, we wish to extend a warm welcome to the Holy City especially to you, Your Eminence, our dear brother Metropolitan Juvenalii. You have been associated with the Mission, and so we consider you a Jerusalemite. We also welcome their Eminences and Graces

who have served the Mission in the past, and who now have been called to other high office in the Church.

We acknowledge also the dedicated service of Archimandrite Alexander, the current Head of the Mission, and those who work with you, dear Father, in the important work of the Mission especially in these critical times in serving the many thousands of pilgrims of the Russian Orthodox Church to the Holy Land every year.

As we keep this blessed anniversary, we recall with thanksgiving all who have contributed to the life and work of the Mission down the decades. We remember the late Bishop Porphyrios of blessed memory, who was instrumental in the founding of the Mission, and the late Bishop Cyril of blessed memory, who re-established the Mission in 1858 after the Crimean War, and under whose leadership the Mission established its home in the Russian Compound. Over the years the Mission has been dedicated to encouraging pilgrimage and providing facilities for pilgrims, and furthermore it took over the care of several holy sites, especially Gorny in Ein Karem, both in Jerusalem and in the rest of the Holy Land.

More importantly, the Mission has placed itself in the service of the Church of Jerusalem, helping in every possible way the Local Church in our diakonia of service and witness to the Gospel of peace and reconciliation.

The many thousands of pilgrims who come here throughout the year are a living testimony that Jerusalem serves the great purpose of being the most important spiritual centre in the world. It is our mission, entrusted to us by Divine Providence, to give ourselves to ensure that Jerusalem sustains its unique multi-cultural, multi-ethnic, and multi-religious character, that embraces Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, and that the Christian presence here remains strong and vital. Without all this, Jerusalem and the Holy Land will lose their essential identity.

Needless to say, Jerusalem is the guarantee, by virtue of the holiness and her spiritual significance, of the Christian presence in the Holy Land and the Middle East. This is why this celebration is of paramount importance, for it shows your contribution, together with our Sister Orthodox Churches, in sustaining this Christian presence.

Whenever Hierarchs gather in Jerusalem with the Local Church, we show the unity and our oneness in the Spirit of Jesus Christ. This unity and presence of the ecumenical Orthodox Church is a great encouragement not only to the Patriarchate, but also to our indigenous Christian community, which does not feel abandoned or forgotten.

We cannot emphasise too strongly the need for our unity of purpose in this regard. Our faith in the hope of the resurrection of our Lord compels us to live out our mission always to declare Jerusalem to be the heavenly as well as the earthly symbol of peaceful co-existence and harmony. Time and again we can say that the Patriarchate of Jerusalem that represents Orthodox Churches and nations has remained firm in its mission, which is religious, spiritual and pastoral. This is why the Church enjoys the respect of all, including other Christian communities and the communities of other faiths, because we have held all others in respect.

We congratulate you on 170 years of faithful service and we pray to Almighty God that you will be given grace for your ongoing life and work in the Holy Land in the years to come under the pastoral care of the Mother Church of Jerusalem.

We now wish to raise our glass in a toast to His Holiness Patriarch Cyril, to His Excellency President Putin, who will always be remembered for his generous financial contribution to the restoration of the Church of the Nativity in and throughout our Patriarchate.

Thank you."