

# **ADDRESS AT THE MEETING OF H.B.THE PATRIARCH OF JERUSALEM THEOPHILOS WITH HIS HOLINESS THE PATRIARCH OF MOSCOW AND ALL RUSSIA CYRIL**

**An Address on the occasion of the celebration  
of the Centenary of the Sacred Local Council  
of the Russian Orthodox Church 1917-1918  
and the restoration of the Patriarchate**

**His Beatitude Theophilos III**

**Patriarch of Jerusalem**

2 December 2017

We rejoice with your Your Holiness and all the Bishops, clergy, monastics, and faithful of the Russian Orthodox Church at home and abroad, in this year of the centenary celebrations of the Great Moscow Council and the Restoration of the Patriarchate, and we bring with us the blessings of the Most Holy and Life-giving Tomb of our Lord Jesus Christ and the prayers of the Christian community of the Holy Land.

There is a great cause for celebration of these two providential events. The All-Russia Council was the fruit of many years of preparation, and sought to restore to the Church of Russia its true nature of sobornost. In so doing, this Great Council has proved to be a fundamental sign of the

conciliar nature of the Orthodox Church. Many eminent Russian theologians, bishops, priests, and laypeople contributed to the preparation and conduct of the Council itself and to its four volumes of definitions that touched on every aspect of the life of the Church.

The Council and its work were all the more remarkable in the face of the complex political climate that had existed in the country since 1905, and which intensified after the October revolution in 1917. However, in spite of huge difficulties, the Council met in three sessions from 1917 to 1918, and at one of its first sessions, having decided to restore the Patriarchate, on 5 November 1917, Saint Tikhon was elected the first Patriarch of Moscow since Tsar Peter the Great abolished the office after the death of Patriarch Adrian in 1700.

The Russian Orthodox Church at home and abroad was able to face the next 70 years with the strength that the work of the Council and the re-establishment of the Patriarchate provided. If the work of the Council itself was never finished because of circumstances beyond the Church's control, yet in the recovery of a deeper sense of sobornost, the Council showed the way for the Orthodox world to renew the conciliar nature of Orthodoxy. This was one of the Council's great gifts to the Orthodox world.

A century after the opening of this historic Local Council and the election of Saint Tikhon as Patriarch of Moscow, the Church of Russia is experiencing a new birth of freedom. While the scars of the wounds that the conflicts of the 20<sup>th</sup> century inflicted on humanity have yet to heal completely, these first years of the 21<sup>st</sup> century have opened new paths for the Russian Orthodox Church, not least in the healing of the schism with the Russian Orthodox Church outside Russia. This year too we have celebrated in Jerusalem the 170<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Russian Ecclesiastical Mission, which throughout its history has been a great support to pilgrims from Russia.

And yet a century after the Local Council and the Restoration of the Patriarchate still sees the Church under terrible pressure in many parts of the world, not least in the Holy Land and the Middle East. As a Church that has known your share of sufferings, you have also been supportive of the Church in the Holy Land as we have been facing our particular difficulties, and we wish to express our gratitude to you, Your Holiness, for the recent statement in support of the Christian presence in the Middle East that you issued with His Grace the Archbishop of Canterbury during his recent visit here.

We, in the Holy Land, are facing a number of specific threats.

For some time now there has been a rise in so-called "Price Tag Hate Crimes", which are primarily directed against religious communities and holy sites, including cemeteries. While the government has condemned such acts, there is yet to be an effective enforcement of laws against such crimes, which are carried out by radical extremists. Such crimes result in a de-stabilizing of our society, which has known peaceful and respectful co-existence for generations.

We are also facing an assault on the traditional freedoms of the Church that are enshrined in the "Status Quo", the set of customs and rules acknowledged by the international community and which guarantee the rights and responsibilities of the Churches. Recently in the Knesset there has been a draft bill circulating among members that, if passed, would severely intrude on the rights of the Churches over their prerogatives to deal freely with their properties. While it is not clear if this bill would pass, it is deeply disturbing that it should be circulating at all, and that it has been backed by one third of the members of the Knesset, for it represents a disturbing development on the part of some, with respect to an understanding of the multi-cultural, multi-ethnic, and multi-religious landscape of Jerusalem and the Holy Land.

And perhaps, most significantly, we are facing a threat to the Christian Quarter and the Christian presence in the Old City of Jerusalem in the so-called "Jaffa Gate" case, in which the District Court wrongfully found in favour of a radical settler group whose stated intent is to make Jerusalem an exclusive city, rather than the inclusive community that it has been for centuries. We believe that this decision was reached on the basis of a poor examination both of the evidence and of the law, and we are appealing this judgement to the high court and we are taking our case to the international community.

We are grateful to Almighty God that the Heads of the Churches and Christian communities of the Holy Land are united in our resolve to resist these threats to our life and our very existence, and this solidarity is a great witness and source of our strength. We are encouraged by the strong support that we have been receiving from Churches and governments around the world, and we are continuing to press our case so that we may maintain the true integrity of the Holy City of Jerusalem and the Holy Land.

As we give thanks to you, Your Holiness, in this great anniversary year for the Russian Orthodox Church, we re-commit ourselves to the long-standing and strong bonds of unity and affection that unite the Church of Russia with the Church of Jerusalem, the Mother of all the Churches. We pray that the strength that the Local Council of 1917-1918 and the restoration of the Patriarchate gave to the Russian Church may deepen, and that our unity in the holy Orthodox faith and in the Eucharistic feast may also be a support to the Christian community of Jerusalem and the Holy Land.

May God grant you, Vladyka, many years, and may God bless the peoples of your beloved Russia and our beloved Holy Land.

Thank you.