

# **THE PATRIARCHATE OF JERUSALEM PARTICIPATES IN THE TWO-DAY CONFERENCE OF THE MINISTRY OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS OF GREECE**

A two-day conference was held by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Greece, from 28<sup>th</sup> February to 1<sup>st</sup> March 2019, with the topic: "Religious –Ecclesiastical diplomacy in the 21<sup>st</sup> century" / "Depicting Political Principles and suggestions for a Strategic course for the exercise of Religious and Ecclesiastical Diplomacy".

In this conference the Patriarchate of Jerusalem was represented by the Patriarchal Commissioner in Constantinople Most Reverend Archbishop Nectarios of Anthedon with his speech titled: "The Patriarchate of Jerusalem as a stability and dialogue factor in the Middle East" which follows below;

## **THE PATRIARCHATE OF JERUSALEM AS A STABILITY AND DIALOGUE FACTOR IN THE MIDDLE EAST**

The Greek Orthodox Patriarchate of Jerusalem, or otherwise "Deir Rum," is an unbroken historical chain of holiness, martyrdom and lasting struggle for the Church of Christ and its Christian congregation, as well as of the preservation of the holy shrines, while preserving their Roman character of many centuries.

The founding of the Church of Jerusalem dates back to the day of the Pentecost and the first Bishop was the Hieromartyr Apostle Saint James the Brother of God († 62 AD).

The Patriarchate of Jerusalem is active in the area of Holy Land, the wider Middle East, the Persian Gulf and the Arab

Emirates.

In its long history, the Patriarchate of Jerusalem was first found under three state and governmental powers and authorities whose interests are on the contrary opposite. This is the difficulty both of the Patriarchate and of the Patriarch, for suddenly the Patriarchate was at the centre of political conflicts, not of local and political conflicts but of political conflicts concerning the global community.

Its presence in the Holy Land is a daily miracle, for both His Beatitude and the Holy Brotherhood are inspired by pure ecclesiastical thought, always invoking the help of God, namely the Incarnate Word of God.

The historical patrimony of the Patriarchate, its powerful theological and cultural beliefs, and its experience of living with other religions make it not only remarkable, but also a force of decisive importance in inter-Orthodox developments, interfaith dialogues, but also in every peace effort in the Middle East.

The Order of the Studios, founded by St. Helen, whose evolution is today's Hagiotaphite Brotherhood, has taken on the protection, preservation and ministry of the Holy Shrines, as well as the pastoring of its logic flock through the religious, social, and philanthropic activity.

However, the great challenge of the Patriarchate is its coexistence with the Jewish and Arab world, and its mission and role as a factor of equilibrium, bearing in mind that Jerusalem is a city in itself religious, inextricably linked to the Sacred History of Christianity, but also to the other two monotheistic religions, Judaism and Islam.

And here is the real dimension of both the role of the Patriarchate and the Patriarch, as well as of the leaders of the other two monotheistic religions for the prevalence of peace in the region. Religions play a key role in this area.

The problem of international diplomacy and of politicians is that because they do not have a deep understanding of religion issues, they try to ignore the role of religion on a global scale.

Moderately, however, they recognize that where there are conflicts of a political nature, in most cases the causes are purely religious, although they try to emphasize more the political or the national part.

Unfortunately, in recent years warfare in the Middle East region and the resulting problems have led to an even greater decline in the Christian population, yet the Church of Jerusalem does not abandon its mission of guiding its logical flock and also by maintaining the liturgical character of the Shrines, in which, souls seeking the truth, both locals and pilgrims, find their Good Shepherd, where He, through His Cross and Resurrection, " Worked Salvation in the centre of the earth".

Apart from its purely religious spiritual role, the Patriarchate has invested in the field of Education and Social Welfare. It is historically established that the first schools and hospitals were founded by it, and today it maintains schools within the State of Israel, the Palestinian Authority and Jordan.

Through Education, it contributes precisely to the coexistence of religious entities, but also to the expansion of religious fanaticism, since Christians are a minority in the Holy Land and in the wider Middle East region.

As a result, the Patriarchate schools particularly host mostly students who are not Orthodox Christians but followers of other religions. This has the effect of contributing to the mutual understanding of the persons and, on the other hand, to the mutual understanding of the religious beliefs and symbols of each one.

And this, of course, is recognized by all, since the Patriarchate has a particular relationship with the Arab Islamic world, and in many cases acts as a bridge between the West and the East.

At the same time, the Patriarchate of Jerusalem with many efforts and sacrifices maintains at the Zion Hill the Patriarchal School of Zion, the Ecclesiastical High School of Lyceum, attended by students, many of whom after graduation remain in the Holy Land, and which acts as a nursery for the members of the Hagiotaphite Brotherhood. Unfortunately, due to the particular situation that prevails, the number of pupils is small and it would be desirable to increase it.

Great efforts are also being made to reopen the Theological School of the Holy Cross, one of the earliest Greek Educational Institutes abroad, from which great theologians, both laity and clergy, graduated, who served in Orthodox Churches of the East.

His Beatitude the Patriarch of Jerusalem, Theophilos III, during the 1st International Conference of the Non-Governmental Organization "Romiosini", which was founded by the Patriarchate of Jerusalem, underlined that the purpose of the NGO is the promotion of our of the Communion in Christ of the Greek-speaking with the Arabic-speaking Roman-Orthodox Christians on the one hand, and the other Orthodox Christians on the other. Besides, this is one of the main goals that His Beatitude has set since the beginning of the practice of His pastoral ministry.

During His speech, he also pointed out that "the special position of the Patriarchate of Jerusalem, under the governmental authority of the State of Israel, the Palestinian Autonomy and the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan and the Principality of Qatar, makes its recognized ab antiquo institutional Religious and Ecclesial Establishment as extremely important both for the unity of the Orthodox

Churches and for the coexistence of the neighboring peoples in the area of its jurisdiction “.

Given the prominent role that can be played by the religion in general and consequently by the Patriarchate of Jerusalem, due to the special religious significance of Jerusalem as a holy city for the Jews, Christians and Muslims, the Patriarch of Jerusalem was invited to a Conference on the relations between the American and Islamic world in Doha, Qatar, in February 2010. In the work of the Religious Leaders Department, H.B. the Patriarch of Jerusalem Theophilos stressed the close relation between religion and politics within the cultural context of the Islamic countries, especially the Middle East countries.

Being aware of their enormous responsibility and mission in the Middle East, the Heads of the Orthodox Churches of the region and the Archbishop of Cyprus re-established the Council of Churches of the Middle East, working together to provide support to the tested Christians in the region, as well as all kinds of spiritual relief and support in the political and religious drama that has evolved for years in the hottest region of the world.

Also, appreciating the important role played by the Patriarchate of Jerusalem in the Muslim world, the current President of the Turkish Republic, Recep Tayyip Erdogan, invited His Beatitude the Patriarch of Jerusalem Theophilos III as speaker at the International Conference on “The Arab Spring and Peace in Middle East – Muslim and Christian Perspectives “in September 2012 in Constantinople.

In short, due to the limited time, I tried to present the importance of the presence and mission of the Venerable Patriarchate of Jerusalem in the Middle East, hoping that a dim light illuminated its great work over the centuries.

Finally, on behalf of His Beatitude my Father and Patriarch,

Theophilos and the Hagiotaphite Brotherhood I would like to thank, for all the years, the unstoppable interest of Greece towards the Patriarchate of Jerusalem in every possible way, and culminating in this interest was the valuable help of the Hellenic State in the restoration of the Sacred Edicule of the Holy Sepulchre.

At the same time, however, Greece understands that the Patriarchate of Jerusalem is a stronghold and a spiritual extension to the most sensitive area of the planet.

By concluding this little suggestion, it would be better to refer to the formulations of His Beatitude the Patriarch of Jerusalem, Theophilos III, at the meeting of the Heads of the Orthodox Churches of the Middle East.

“Today, all political diplomats, etc., have become aware of the importance and role of religious leadership in the peaceful coexistence of people. For this reason, all religious leaders are invited to participate in any negotiations or dialogues. Their contribution is necessary and let it not seem strange to you if you look in the long run for political and international authorities in the religious leadership to find a solution to the issue of Jerusalem.

If a solution to the Jerusalem issue is found, then all problems will be resolved both regionally and globally, because the whole world crisis is based on Jerusalem. So if World Peace can ever prevail, it will again depend on Jerusalem. ”

**From Secretariat-General**