

H.B. THEOPHILOS III MEETS WITH U.S. CHURCH LEADERS OVER CHALLENGES TO CHRISTIANS' PRESENCE IN JERUSALEM

His Beatitude our Father and Patriarch of Jerusalem Theophilos III, met in Washington D.C., with influential Church leaders in the United States of America to discuss means of supporting the authentic Christian presence in the Holy Land in general and in Jerusalem in particular.

H.B. considered the meeting itself as a positive step towards strengthening the International Community of the Holy Sepulchre organization [ICoHS], which is working to build and strengthen the bond of peace between Christians in the Holy Land and their brothers and sisters around the world.

H.B. Theophilos III presented updates on the Jaffa Gate Church properties (The Imperial and Petra Hotels) which make up the entrance to the Christian Quarter of Old Jerusalem. H.B. said: "The likely take-over of buildings there, by a radical group, if unabated, will undermine the integrity and compromise the Christian character of the Christian Quarter of the Old City of Jerusalem; it will further threaten the access of pilgrims and the local community to our Churches, schools, health facilities and the Church of the Holy Sepulchre itself. This will indeed change the character of the Christian Quarter forever."

H.B. our Father and Patriarch of Jerusalem, said that two years ago he was given an important mandate by fellow Church leaders in Jerusalem; adding: "I was tasked to engage political and religious leaders around the world concerning the challenges that Christians currently face in the Holy

Land. As Church leaders we are as one, united both in the Spirit, and in crucial concern for the Church and our communities." Furthermore, H.B. Theophilos III stressed that there is a clear and present challenge to the continued existence of the Christian community in the Holy Land, and only by strengthening the bonds of peace with "our brothers and sisters around the world will we be able to remove this existential threat in our beloved region."

H.B. informed his audience that Christians in Jerusalem face multiple threats due to the fragile nature of politics which makes the Churches an easy target for politicians pursuing quick votes. He added "Against this political backdrop are practical problems, among them desecration and vandalism of Churches, and intimidation from radical groups."

From Secretariat-General