

STATEMENT IN RELATION TO THE PROPERTIES OF JAFFA GATE

Holy City of Jerusalem, 5th August 2019.

The Orthodox Patriarchate of Jerusalem views the attempts of the radical organization, Ateret Cohanim, to seize church properties located in Jerusalem's Jaffa Gate and al-Mu'athamiyah, as a strike to the indigenous Christian presence in the Holy City. The Patriarchate affirms that changing the Status Quo in the Old City of Jerusalem, especially in Jaffa Gate; being the main entrance to the various Patriarchates and to the pilgrim route to the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, threatens the continuous hundreds-of-years old mosaic and balance that shores the good relations between Jerusalemites of different faiths.

The Patriarchate stresses that its properties located within the walls of Old City Jerusalem are for the service of pilgrims and visitors of the Holy City especially those on the pilgrim route to the Church of the Holy Sepulchre. The Patriarchate will continue to exercise its right and duty of defending itself, the holy sites and the Church heritage.

After the Israeli High Court of Justice wrongly rejected the Patriarchate's appeal on the decision of the District Court, which approved the dubious transactions involving the above mentioned properties, and true to our belief that justice shall always prevail, the Patriarchate and through its legal advisers and lawyers, succeeded in obtaining unequivocal evidence that proves the voidance of the transactions and the corrupt nature of the deals, that His Beatitude Patriarch of Jerusalem Theophilos III has rejected along with the brotherhood of the Holy Sepulchre in addition to the rejection

of those deals by all of the Jerusalem Churches as per their joint statements issued in 2017 as well as on 12th June 2019.

Among evidence attained by the Patriarchate are documents dating back to 1996 showing that the radical's financial supporter, billionaire and financier Irving Moskowitz, had reached an agreement with one of the tenants of the Petra Hotel to buy the protected lease rights for \$ 4.5 million, in addition to his willingness to pay for other expenses as well as the adjacent "Little Petra Hotel". This is a clear proof of the corruption of the suspicious deals of 2004, since it is unreasonable to agree to buy the tenants' "protected lease rights" for \$ 4.5 million in 1996, while 9 years later (in 2004) to claim to have purchased from the Patriarchate (the owner of the properties) the property itself, including a further hostel, being the "Little Petra Hotel", for a mere half a million \$.

The Patriarchate also discovered that Ateret Cohanim, through its officer Mati Dan, used to pay bribes to "manage their affairs" in connection to the church properties. These efforts coincided with local civic authorities, such as the Municipality of Jerusalem and the local Tax Authority, imposing arbitrary measures against tenants of the church properties resulting in the weakening of their position.

The new evidence that the Patriarchate has obtained, confirm that Ateret Cohanim and its companies forged documents and initiated court proceedings based on these forged documents, despite Ateret Cohanim's knowledge that they were forged. The evidence shows that the suspicious deals of 2004 involved bribes by Ateret Cohanim, and all indications point to the bribes being paid to the then Patriarchate employee, Nicholas Papadimas.

The Patriarchate notes that the new evidence includes documents signed by leaders of the radical organization Ateret Cohanim, as well as audio recordings by its managing director

Mati Dan and advocate Eitan Geva, that prove that they lied and concealed facts during the legal proceedings in court.

Following receipt of this new evidence, the legal advisors of the Patriarchate worked relentlessly to examine, revise and evaluate this evidence. The legal advisors concluded that the new evidence obtained by the Patriarchate, following the decision of the High Court of Justice in favour of the radical Ateret Cohanim, should prompt the Court to reconsider its decision.

Based on the above, and despite the fact that the planned legal action by the Patriarchate is rare and difficult, and despite the fact that the judicial proceedings regarding the above mentioned properties have exhausted the Patriarchate for a decade and a half, the Orthodox Patriarchate of Jerusalem considers the Old City of Jerusalem a "red line" and the core of the Christian belief, and the Patriarchate pledges that it will defend these principles and reclaim its' properties; whether through judicial or diplomatic efforts, and in cooperation with the promoters of peace, joined by Christians around the world, protecting the Church heritage at the doors of the Holy Sepulchre and in the heart of the Christian Quarter.

Accordingly, the Orthodox Patriarchate of Jerusalem announces that today it has filed a new lawsuit, against the radical "Ateret Cohanim" organisation and its companies, in order to overturn the decision of the court, which ratified the ominous deals of the properties of Jaffa Gate and al-Mu'athameya, by exposing the practices of fraud, deception and bribery involved in those unauthorised property transactions.

The Patriarchate calls upon the Heads of States and Heads of Churches around the world as well as on all those who strive for peace and justice in the Holy Land, to protect the historic and legal doctrine of the "Status Quo", relating to the Holy Shrines, and to defend the Holy Sites from all

underhanded and immoral dealings.

From Secretariat-General