

THE ADDRESS OF HIS BEATITUDE THE PATRIARCH OF JERUSALEM AT THE CITY HALL OF JERUSALEM

The annual New Year Reception for the New Year 2020, hosted by the Mayor of Jerusalem Mr. Moshe Lion, was held at the City Hall of Jerusalem on Tuesday evening, January 15/28, 2020.

For this reception, Geronda Secretary-General His Eminence Archbishop Aristarchos of Constantina delivered the address of H.H.B our Father and Patriarch of Jerusalem Theofilos before the Mayor and all the guests, Diplomats, representatives and Heads of the faith communities.

The following is the address:

“Mr. Mayor,

Esteemed Members of the Municipal Government,

Your Eminences,

Your Graces,

Dear Fathers,

Ladies and Gentlemen

WE greet you Mr. Mayor, with our best wishes for this New Year, as you take the reins of your important administrative task.

With your administration, we hope to embark on a relationship of understanding between the Municipality and the Churches. This is the time for a fresh direction and new frameworks for the well-being of all in our City. For as the Psalm says, “how good and pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity”! (Psalm 133).

We are heartened by your vision that encompasses concern for the vitality of the historically rooted Christian presence in the Holy City, and the ability of the Christian community to live and thrive here. We also have a deep commitment to the many thousands of pilgrims who come to Jerusalem on a daily basis, who are nourished by the spiritual oasis that comprise the Holy Places of worship, and whose presence here ensures the human-divine encounter that yields mutual respect and peaceful symbiosis. For it is written, "Blessed are the peacemakers; for they shall be called the children of God" (Matt. 5:9).

As we consider the well-being of the Churches and the Christian presence here, we are calling upon your wisdom and strong leadership, Mr. Mayor, to oppose those who would impose municipal taxes on the Churches and our properties, which are used for our ministry and service to the community, just as we would oppose such taxes on any other religious group. Such moves to impose these new and unprecedented taxes undermine the historic and sacred rights and privileges of the Churches that have been recognized by successive rulers and authorities in this region.

We are also confident that you will be steadfast and resolute in standing with us in our efforts to preserve the Christian character of the Christian Quarter of the Old City and to protect the "Pilgrim Route" to the Holy Sites, including the Church of the Holy Sepulchre. The protection of access in the Christian Quarter is primarily protection against the relentless pressure, infringement of rights, and attempted takeovers by radical elements in our society who are threatening the multi-cultural and multi-religious fabric of our Holy City and its historic Christian presence. For as it is said in the Psalms, "he who loves unrighteousness hates his own soul" (Psalm 11:5).

By engaging the Churches and taking our concerns and sensitivities into consideration, you will not be diminishing

the standing of the local authorities and other communities. On the contrary, such understanding of the mission of the Churches in this way only strengthens the unique and vibrant spiritual and religious character of Jerusalem.

So, as we look to the New Year and to your administration with hope and expectation, we wish to assure you, Mr. Mayor, of our renewed engagement with you and with the municipal authority, to ensure that the life of our City remains rooted in our historic, cultural and religious identity, so that together we may all contribute to guarding Jerusalem as a beacon of co-existence, peace, and reconciliation, which will in turn ensure the flourishing of all our people, i.e. Jews, Christians and Muslims.

We wish you, your family and your administration a very happy, blessed and peaceful New Year.

Thank you."

From Secretariat-General