

HEADS OF CHURCHES MEET WITH ISRAEL'S PRESIDENT AND INTERIOR MINISTER OVER NEW YEAR'S RECEPTION AT THE PRESIDENTIAL RESIDENCE

Heads of Churches in Jerusalem, led by His Beatitude Patriarch Theophilos III, were invited on Wednesday evening, December 29, to the residence of the Israeli President, Mr. Isaac Herzog, who was accompanied by the Interior Minister, Madam Ayelet Shaked.

During the reception dedicated by the Israeli President to congratulate Church Leaders for the occasion of New Year's, the topic of the rising assaults against Christians in Jerusalem on the hands at Jewish radicals, were discussed.

"The action of these extremists is a direct assault against our shared values and ideals that we hold as essential for the good order and flourishing of our common life. For we all must work together to curb these unbridled ambitions of all radicals within our communities for the well-being and safety of all our people. We, the Heads of Churches, re-affirm our commitment to engage in urgent dialogue on this issue, as declared in our recent statement," His Beatitude Patriarch Theophilos noted.

The speech of the Patriarch of the Holy City, however, emphasized that those acts of these "fringe radical groups" are in no way a representative of "the State of Israel or the Jewish people", and that Israel is a state that is committed to "the historic rights of the various religious communities and religious freedom".

As for the President's efforts and the long legacy of shared concern, Patriarch Theophilos showed gratitude towards the "unfaltering support of the historic communities and the rich mosaic of diversity that shapes the heart of the life of our beloved Holy Land," assuring that "the Heads of Churches will do everything in our capacity to assist you and the government in continuing to uphold, to our common life, that essential cooperation which have sustained us for centuries."

Last but not least, His Beatitude took the opportunity to also acknowledge the coordination between the Heads of Churches and the Ministry of Interior's Department for Christian Affairs. Therefore, he noted that as Heads of Churches they "have nothing but recognition for the unwavering cooperation, work and assistance they provide our institutions with" and went on to thank Mr. Cezar Marjeh and his team for their dedication and professionalism.

In response, Mr. Herzog's declared his country's commitment to freedom of worship and religion, and passed on a monumental message that "Israel will stand strong against any forms of racism, discrimination or extremism, and we reject any assault on or threat to religious communities, leaders or sites. May we all work together to expand the circle of peace and tolerance in the Holy Land, our region, and the world."

As for the Interior Minister, Shaked added that she was proud her Ministry is able to support the development of Christian holy sites, and expressed her hopes for a soon return of Christian pilgrimage to the Holy Land.

News by: Heba Hrimat.

