

MEETING OF HIS BEATITUDE PATRIARCH THEOPHILOS III WITH A DELEGATION FROM THE EUROPEAN UNION

His Beatitude Patriarch Theophilos III, Patriarch of the Holy City of Jerusalem, along with Latin Patriarch Pierbattista Pizzaballa, Melkite Greek Catholic Bishop Yasser Ayyash, and Rev. Don Binder on behalf of the Episcopal Diocese, met on Wednesday evening, June 1, with a delegation from the European Union, and took turns discussing the reality of the hardships Christians endure on daily basis in the Holy City of Jerusalem.

During the meeting which was held at the Imperial Hotel in Jerusalem, and was followed by a dinner, His Beatitude Patriarch Theophilos III delivered the following speech:

*“Respected Members of the European Diplomatic Corps,
Distinguished Experts in the MENA Region,
Beloved Fellow Heads of the Churches,
Ladies and Gentlemen,*

We welcome you warmly to the Imperial Hotel and to the historic pilgrims’ gateway to the Holy Sepulchre in the Holy City of Jerusalem.

We are deeply encouraged by your visit, and we wish to commend you on your desire to consult with the Heads

of the Churches and Christian Communities of the Holy Land, especially at this time when the integrity of this region and the future of the Christian presence here are uncertain as at no other period in our lifetime.

For centuries this Holy City and the Holy Land, and indeed the entire region of the Middle East has been the home to a great civilisation. This region of the divine-human encounter has woven a multi-ethnic, multi-cultural, and multi-religious tapestry of peoples that is at the heart of our collective identity. This rich heritage, in which Jews, Christians, and Muslims have grown and lived side by side for generations, is being undermined by a fresh and destructive radicalism on the part of those who wish to see this great tapestry picked apart.

The challenges that we face are serious and pernicious, for they strike at the heart of our uniqueness. As is well known, we face the provocations of radical groups that seek to make this city and this region exclusively their own. We are meeting this evening in the great focal point of this conflict, which is the Imperial Hotel, which is next door to the Petra Hotels, which are the target of Israeli radical groups to make permanent changes in the Christian Quarter of this Quarter. Furthermore, another entrance to the Christian Quarter, the New Gate, which also leads to the Holy Sepulchre, is under the same pressure and condition. The consequences of their intention are incalculable and will change the character of this City forever, to the detriment of the Christian presence. Our mission is always to keep the Holy City open to all, without distinction or discrimination.

We face other challenges, including the consequences of the ongoing pandemic, the economic situation, the restrictions that Christians are facing from the political situation, and the lack of opportunity for our young people to aspire to a better future.

We have only one mission; to ensure the integrity of the Christian character of the Holy City of Jerusalem and the Holy Land, and to do all that we can to enable the Christian presence in this region to remain here and flourish. We believe that our historic experience as those who have built this multi-ethnic, multi-cultural and multi-religious society together with our Jewish and Muslim sisters and brothers who also understand the reality of our region, has the capacity to maintain this identity on which centuries of common life have been built.

This mission is not just for ourselves alone. This historic identity of the Holy Land is of enduring importance to our world. Here are the seeds of a genuine, stable, and strong diverse society that can be a model for others. And because of the religious significance of this region for the three Abrahamic traditions, which make up the majority of the religions of the world, the future of our world is directly related to the future of this region.

The Heads of the Churches have always been ready, and continue to stand ready, to work with the European Union and your respective governments, as well as with all sides of our society in this region, for lasting solutions to the challenges that we face, so that the unique witness of this land of the divine-human encounter, which brings hope to the countless millions of people every day, might be an example of encouragement to all.

Once again, we thank you for your visit to us, and with eagerness, we look forward to working in close collaboration with you.

Thank you”.

From Secretariat-General







