

HIS BEATITUDE RECEIVES THE HEAD OF THE EU REPRESENTATION OFFICE TO WEST BANK & GAZA STRIP WITH THE HEADS OF CHURCHES

Today, Tuesday, October 3, 2023, His Beatitude our Father and Patriarch of Jerusalem Theophilos received the Head of the EU Representation Office to West Bank & Gaza Strip, Mr Alexandre Stutzmann with the Heads of Churches and their representatives.

In this meeting, His Beatitude said that the Churches in the Holy Land aim to promote reconciliation and peace, the Holy Places should be accessible to all, and efforts must be fortified to protect the Christians from the attacks of radical Israeli elements. His Beatitude also emphasised that the Churches are effectively cooperating among themselves and are steadfast in their struggle to keep the Status Quo of the Old City of Jerusalem unchanged.

The Patriarch also referred to his recent visit to His Holiness Pope Francis in the Vatican and joined the events of elevating the Latin Patriarch Pierrebatista Pizzaballa to the Sacred College of Cardinals.

Mr Stutzmann expressed his appreciation for the work of the Churches and said he feels at home in the Patriarchate. He also said that he happened to be present in incidents when Christians were spat on by radical Israeli groups. He noted also that the European Union is not a religious institution but it has Christian roots, because, he said, "our fathers were Christian democrats". He expressed his commitment to be

in sympathy and support of the Christian communities and in support of the religious and cultural heritage in the Holy Land; "we as politicians shouldn't forget the role of religion in the solution of difficult problems".

The Heads and representatives of the other Churches referred also to issues and problems the Churches face. His Paternity the Custos referred to the recent problem in "Stella Maris" in Haifa and how the Christian properties are recognized as property of the Churches but without the right to be developed. Also, the Custos referred to the lack of free access of the Christians to their Churches and to the infringements on the freedom to worship as was seen in the feast of the Orthodox Church of the Transfiguration on Mount Tabor.

His Eminence Bishop Marcutso said; "we try to keep our properties because they help the Churches sustain religious and educational institutions. Our Christians, especially the young people, feel vulnerable. We have our own educational system and try to teach our young people to live in peace and coexist with members of other religions.

On this occasion of the visit, His Beatitude offered Mr Stutzmann a picture of the Old City of Jerusalem.

From Secretariat-General