

SIGNING AGREEMENT ON THE INTEGRATION OF WORKINGS OF THE SACRED EDICULE AND THE ROTUNDA AROUND THE HOLY SEPULCHRE

On Monday afternoon, May 14/27, 2019, at the Franciscan Monastery, there was a meeting of H.H.B. the Patriarch of Jerusalem Theophilos, Geronda Secretary-General Most Reverend Archbishop Aristarchos of Constantina, and Dragouman Archimandrite Mattheos, with the Franciscans, the Custos Fr. Francesco Patton, Fr. Dobromiro, Fr. David, and with the Armenian Patriarch in Jerusalem Archbishop Nourhan Manougian, the Hegoumen of the Armenians at the Church of the Holy Sepulchre Fr. Samuel and Fr. Gurion, for the signing of the agreement for the completion of the maintenance and restoration project of the Sacred Edicule and the Rotunda, after the maintenance and restoration works of the Sacred Edicule that were completed two years ago under the technical supervision of the Technical University of Athens.

His Beatitude our Father and Patriarch of Jerusalem Theophilos made the following interview regarding the signing of this agreement:

“Your Paternity,

Your Beatitude,

Dear Brothers,

It is a great blessing, for us to be here in this very special place, and it is a great blessing, because what we are about to sign is the confirmation of what is being mentioned in your

script, it is the confirmation of the initiative that was taken some years ago, for the restoration of the Holy Edicule of the Holy Sepulchre.

It is true that our common initiatives and joint venture and common action that we altogether work for the restoration of the Holy Edicule of the Holy Sepulchre, that opened a new phase I would say, in our history, in our cooperation, in our co-existence, and above all, in our mission and as witness to the Holy City of Jerusalem and of course to the Holy Places, with the Crown of them, the Holy Sepulchre, which as you said, indeed has become the main destination not only for our own pilgrims the Christian pilgrims, but also the destination of all other visitors and non-Christian pilgrims as well.

Today is really a special day, not only for us and for our Communities, that we are in charge of the custody of the Holy Places, but it is important for the Holy City of Jerusalem because everybody is now realizing and acknowledges that if Jerusalem maintains her Christian character as well, it depends on us as well. Therefore our mission is very important, not only in religious terms but also in diplomatic terms and inevitably in political terms.

I would like very much from the bottom of my heart to express on behalf of our Brotherhood, and myself personally, our thanks and appreciation, and we hope and pray that this initiative, to not just restore the foundations and the pavement of the Holy Sepulchre, but that this would be the completion of the restoration of the Holy Sepulchre, that has started so many years ago. And I think that this will bring the Holy Sepulchre to a new era, to a new phase, because, so far, due the restoration works which are going on, there is no doubt that the Holy Sepulchre suffers from its holiness and sanctity and reverence. But by completing the restoration works, the Holy Sepulchre will recover its splendour.

And I must rest you assured that our technical team is ready

to join forces with your own technical team, as well as with the technical team of our Brothers the Armenians. And we are ready also in any possible way, to make our contribution, so that the works will go smoothly, as it happened with the restoration of the Holy Sepulchre.

Thank you very much indeed! Christos Anesti! Christ is risen!"

From Secretariat-General

ANNOUNCEMENT OF THE MEETING OF THE HEADS OF ORTHODOX CHURCHES IN THE MIDDLE EAST

In their meeting on Thursday, April 5/18, 2019, at the Holy Archdiocese of Cyprus, their Beatitudes the Heads of Primeval Patriarchates, Theodoros II of Alexandria, Ioannis III of Antioch, Theophilos III of Jerusalem and Chrysostom II of Cyprus announced the following;

“Their Beatitudes the Heads of the Orthodox Churches in the Middle East, Theodoros II of Alexandria, Ioannis III of Antioch, Theophilos III of Jerusalem and Chrysostom II of Cyprus, met on April 18, 2019 at the Holy Archdiocese of Cyprus in Nicosia.

On their Meeting they prayed for the world peace, the stability of the Holy Churches in various parts of the world and especially of the tested Middle East. They also prayed for the relief of the peoples of this region, so that the faithful belonging to these Churches may continue their Orthodox

witness for our Lord, the Resurrected from the dead, and especially here, in the blessed land where Christ and his all-famous disciples walked, as well as for the whole world, which longs and yearns for the hopeful redeeming message of the Gospel.

Their Beatitudes the Heads of Churches, underlined the need to make maximum efforts to ensure stability in the Middle East and discussed the most important ecclesiastical issues concerning the establishment of Christian presence in this region and the deepening of co-operation among local churches in the pursuit of the same goal. They also appealed to all political members to work, in view of the reflection on this region, for the elimination of the injustice brought to its peoples, in the wake of the wars, the occupation and the financial difficulties. During the private meeting, held by the two Heads of Churches Antioch and Jerusalem, in honesty, brotherhood and love, they exchanged various views on the problem, which employs two local Churches and expressed their intention and good disposition, to exceed direct impact on these difficulties, in order to reach the desirable Eucharistic Society. In addition, their Beatitudes the Heads of the Orthodox Churches in Middle East discussed the various ecclesiastical problems that occasionally arise within the Orthodox Church, and especially considered ways to solve them. They also discussed the problems that arose after the granting of the autocephalus to the Orthodox Church in Ukraine.

Following the briefing of His Beatitude Archbishop of Cyprus, Chrysostom, on the mediation initiative, which he personally undertook, the three Heads of Churches are aligned with this, so that His Beatitude will continue it for the benefit of the Orthodox Church in Christ.

In the spirit of this meeting, Their Beatitudes and Holy Heads of Churches, called on all sides to work on one hand to achieve the Eucharistic unity, which constitutes the body of the Church in Christ Jesus and on the other hand, to protect

PATRIARCHATE OF JERUSALEM

The answer of the Patriarchate of Jerusalem to the content of Mr. Demetrios Alikakos' book on the issue of the Holy Light is the one that has already been given to him from the Secretariat-General, that "the official statement of the Patriarchate for the Service of the Holy Light is the one that is included in the program of the Service of the Holy Light on Holy and Great Saturday each year, at the Website of the Patriarchate, at the projects of the Hagiotaphite Fathers and of the memorable Hagiotaphite Kallistos Miliaras, at the journal "Nea Sion" and to all those matters referring to it from the Holy Bible and the Fathers of the Church".

From Secretariat-General

ANNOUNCEMENT OF THE PATRIARCHATE OF JERUSALEM

The website of the Patriarchate of Jerusalem announces to its readers that H.H.B. our Father and Patriarch of Jerusalem Theophilos will be in Qatar from Thursday 8th/21st to Sunday 11th/24th February 2019. His Beatitude will officiate the consecration of the Holy Church of St. Isaac the Syriac on Friday 9th/22nd February 2019.

Details on the event will be posted in due course.

From Secretariat-General

ANNOUNCEMENT

As we approach the Christmas festivities, the Patriarchate announces to its Priests, Care takers and congregation throughout its jurisdiction that there has been no change in the festal cycle according to the Julian calendar which we follow.

Therefore, on December 12/25, 2018, the Patriarchate does not celebrate Christmas, but the commemoration of St. Spyridon, the wonderworker, Bishop of Trimythounta, and on this day, the members of the flock are able to socially congratulate the members of the other Christian denominations who celebrate the Christmas Feast on this day, according to the Gregorian Western calendar.

From Secretariat-General

NEW VIOLATION OF THE HOLY ZION CHAPEL

On Mid-Pentecost Wednesday, April 19/May 2, 2018, radical fanatics from the Yesiva Synagogue by David's Tomb violated the railing and wire mesh of the chapel-catacomb at the outdoor area of the Holy Monastery of the Holy Trinity and the Priest School of Zion of the Patriarchate, and entered illegally, refusing to leave.

The transgressors were removed from the premises by the Israeli Police of Jerusalem with great difficulty, due to their strong resistance.

The Patriarchate protests strongly against this new violation of this sacred place and is determined to exercise all rightful legal action against the transgressors.

From Secretariat-General

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THE RE-OPENING OF THE CHURCH OF THE HOLY SEPULCHRE

The Church of the Holy Sepulchre was closed for all the pilgrims and visitors after the Liturgy of the Sunday of Orthodoxy, February 12/25, 2018 with the common decision of the Three Major Communities – Greek Orthodox, Franciscans and Armenians – in protest of the recent illegitimate tax measures imposed by the Jerusalem Municipality on the Churches of the Holy Land, as well as in protest against the proposed “Bill of Church lands”.

On Tuesday evening February 14/27, 2018, the Prime Minister of Israel Mr. Benjamin Netanyahu made the statement posted in the

link below;

<http://www.jp-newsgate.net/en/2018/02/27/38319>

According to this statement, all actions from the municipality regarding the collection of taxes as well as all legislative activity on Church properties was suspended, including the “Bill of Church lands” proposed to the Knesset by Member of Knesset Rachel Azaria. There was also a decision to establish a professional team led by Minister Tzachi Hanegbi with the cooperation of the representatives of the Churches in order to solve the current crisis.

The Three Major Communities saw the action of Prime Minister Netanyahu, as constructive and agreed on the re-opening of the Gate of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre at 4.00 a.m. on Wednesday February 15/28, 2018.

From Secretariat-General

**STATEMENTS BY THE HEADS OF
CHURCHES AND THE ISRAELI
PRIME MINISTER ON THE RE-
OPENING OF THE CHURCH OF THE**

HOLY SEPULCHRE

27 February 2018

We, the heads of Churches in charge of the Holy Sepulcher and the Status Quo governing the various Christian Holy Sites in Jerusalem – the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate, the Custody of the Holy Land and the Armenian Patriarchate – give thanks to God for the statement released earlier today by Prime Minister Netanyahu and offer our gratitude to all those who have worked tirelessly to uphold the Christian presence in Jerusalem and to defend the Status Quo.

After the constructive intervention of the Prime Minister, The Churches look forward to engage with Minister Hanegbi, and with all those who love Jerusalem to ensure that Our Holy City, where our Christian presence continues to face challenges, remains a place where the three Monotheistic faiths may live and thrive together.

Following these recent developments we hereby announce that the Church of the Holy Sepulcher, that is the site of the crucifixion of Our Lord and also of His Resurrection, will be reopened to the pilgrims tomorrow, February 28th, 2018 at 4.00 AM

THEOPHILOS III Patriarch of Jerusalem

FRANCESCO PATTON Custos of the Holy Land

NOURHAN MANOUGIAN Armenian Patriarch of Jerusalem

The statement of Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu follows below as communicated by the Prime Minister's Media Adviser:

PMO Statement

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and Jerusalem Mayor Nir Barkat have agreed to establish a professional team led by

Minister Tzachi Hanegbi, with the participation of all relevant parties, to formulate a solution for the issue of municipal taxes on properties owned by churches that are not houses of worship

As part of the discussion between the Prime Minister's Office and the Jerusalem Municipality regarding churches' municipal taxes, Prime Minister Netanyahu and Jerusalem Mayor Barkat have agreed that a professional team led by Minister Hanegbi, including representatives of the Ministries of Finance, Foreign Affairs and the Interior and the Jerusalem Municipality, will formulate a solution to the issue of municipal taxes (which do not apply to houses of worship). The team will negotiate with the representatives of the churches to resolve the issue.

As a result, the Jerusalem Municipality is suspending the collection actions it has taken in recent weeks.

In addition, following a request by the heads of the churches to enter negotiations regarding the sale of land in Jerusalem, Prime Minister Netanyahu has asked Minister Hanegbi to examine the issue. While the Minister is doing so, all legislative activity on the matter will be suspended.

Israel is proud to be the only country in the Middle East where Christians and believers of all faiths have full freedom of religion and worship. Israel is home to a flourishing Christian community and welcomes its Christian friends from all over the world.

THE CHRISTIAN CHURCHES OF JERUSALEM PROTEST AGAINST THE ILLEGITIMATE TAX MEASURES IMPOSED BY JERUSALEM MUNICIPALITY ON THEM

After the Divine Liturgy on Sunday of Orthodoxy, February 12/25, 2018, the Heads of the 3 Major Communities of the All-holy Church of the Resurrection – the Greek Orthodox Jerusalem Patriarchate, the Franciscan Custody in the Holy Land and the Armenian Jerusalem Patriarchate – protested strongly against the recent illegitimate tax measures imposed by Jerusalem Municipality on the Churches of the Holy Land and decided the indefinite closure of the Holy Sepulchre.

The protest, read by H.H.B. our Father and Patriarch of Jerusalem Theophilos on behalf of the 3 Major Communities, is posted in the link below;

<http://www.jp-newsgate.net/en/2018/02/25/38248>

From Secretariat-General

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STATEMENT ON MUNICIPAL THREATS AND THE DISCRIMINATORY “CHURCH LANDS BILL”

25.02.2018

We, the Heads of Churches in charge of the Holy Sepulchre and the Status Quo governing the various Christian Holy Sites in Jerusalem – the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate, the Custody of the Holy Land and the Armenian Patriarchate – are following with great concern the systematic campaign against the Churches and the Christian community in the Holy Land, in flagrant violation of the existing Status Quo.

Recently, this systematic and offensive campaign has reached an unprecedented level as the Jerusalem Municipality issued scandalous collection notices and orders of seizure of Church assets, properties and bank accounts for alleged debts of punitive municipal taxes. A step that is contrary to the historic position of the Churches within the Holy City of Jerusalem and their relationship with the civil authorities. These actions breach existing agreements and international obligations which guarantee the rights and the privileges of the Churches, in what seems as an attempt to weaken the Christian presence in Jerusalem. The greatest victims in this are those impoverished families who will go without food and housing, as well as the children who will be unable to attend school.

The systematic campaign of abuse against Churches and Christians reaches now its peak as a discriminatory and racist bill that targets solely the properties of the Christian Community in the Holy Land is being promoted. This abhorrent

bill is set to advance today in a meeting of a ministerial committee which if approved, would make the expropriation of the lands of Churches possible. This reminds us all of laws of a similar nature which were enacted against the Jews during dark periods in Europe.

This systematic and unprecedented attack against Christians in the Holy Land severely violates the most basic, ab antique and sovereign rights, trampling on the delicate fabric of relations between the Christian Community and the authorities for decades.

Therefore, and recalling the statement of the Patriarchs and Heads of Local Churches in Jerusalem, dated 14 February, 2018 and their previous statement of September 2017, as a measure of protest, we decided to take this unprecedented step of closure of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre.

Together with all Heads of Churches in the Holy Land we stand united, firm and resolute in protecting our rights and our properties.

May the Holy Spirit answer our prayers and bring a resolution to this historic Crisis in our Holy City.

THEOPHILOS III Patriarch of Jerusalem

FRANCESCO PATTON Custos of the Holy Land

NOURHAN MANNOUGIAN Armenian Patriarch of Jerusalem