

FINAL COMMUNIQUÉ OF THE 10TH GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE MIDDLE EAST COUNCIL OF CHURCHES.

1-Under the theme "*and the multitude of them that believed were of one heart*" (Acts 4:32), the 10th General Assembly of the Middle East Council of Churches was held in the ancient city of Paphos, Cyprus, on Tuesday and Wednesday the 29th and 30th of November, 2011. All the member churches that constitute the four families of the Council (Oriental Orthodox, Orthodox, Evangelical and Catholic) attended the meeting that was hosted by the Orthodox Church of Cyprus represented by its Archbishop his Beatitude Chrysostomos II.

2-The General Assembly proceeded with its planned agenda that included words of welcome from the Archbishop of Cyprus, as well as the four presidents of the Council, the General Secretary, and a host of guests that came from the East and West representing their churches and other international ecumenical bodies. It discussed the reports of the General Secretary, the Finance Secretary and the coordinator of the *Task Force* that had been entrusted with the future restructuring of the Council. The Assembly also elected the presidents for the coming four years. These are:

His Holiness Aram I, Catholicos of the Armenian Orthodox House of Cilicia – on behalf of the Oriental Orthodox family.

His Beatitude Theophilos III, Patriarch of the Greek Orthodox Church of Jerusalem – on behalf of the Orthodox family.

His Grace Bishop Munib Younan, president of the Lutheran Church of Jordan and the Holy Land – on behalf of the

Evangelical family

His Beatitude Mar Ignatius Yusuf III Younan, Patriarch of the Syrian Catholic Church of Antioch – on behalf of the Catholic family.

His Grace Bishop Boulos Matar was elected honorary president.

3-The General Assembly also elected a new Executive Committee and concluded its deliberations by electing Father Dr. Paul Rouhana, of the Maronite (Catholic) Church, as the new General Secretary for a coming period of four years. He replaces Mr. Guirgis Ibrahim Saleh, who was elected as honorary General Secretary.

4-The General Assembly asserted its firm belief that Christian unity remains the basic purpose and mission of MECC. It carefully considered the present state of the Church in the Middle East from spiritual, social and national perspectives.

5-Those assembled gave thanks to God for the new atmosphere of love, reconciliation, cooperation and dialogue that now prevails amongst the churches, and in the hearts, minds and souls of church leaders. All agreed that MECC remains the common meeting ground for all the Christians of the Middle East. Thus efforts must be intensified to revive the Council and strengthen the ecumenical movement.

6-Christians are deeply rooted in the East. They have effectively participated in and contributed to its renaissance and in defending the integrity of its territories and all the pertaining national rights of its inhabitants.

7-They stand ready and committed to participate in the building of a new future for the Middle East and accordingly they renounce the idea of emigration in spite of all the difficulties that Middle Eastern Christians are presently facing. They call upon all the faithful to hold steadfast to their hope in the peaceful coexistence of the peoples of the

Middle East, and thus they support the recent and ongoing movements of reform, change and development for the common good of humanity.

8-In view of what is now occurring in some countries of The Middle East, the General Assembly wishes to remind all concerned parties, *but especially the International Community*, of the need to preserve and protect fundamental human rights and principles, such as the freedom of thought, of religious belief and of political action.

9-The Assembly asserts its repudiation of resorting to violence as a means of conflict resolution, no matter who the perpetrator may be. Dialogue, equal citizenship and the rule of law – in the context of a civil and just state – must prevail amongst all the peoples of the Middle East.

10-The General Assembly reiterates its support for all just causes and in particular the right of the Palestinian people to self-determination, in accordance with international legality.

11-In this context, the Middle East Council of Churches stresses the great need to protect and preserve all holy sites and houses of worship. It deplores the acts of bombing of these places, and especially condemns the killing and displacement of Christians. Those assembled consider religious freedom and the freedom of worship as sacred human rights. Thus they call upon those in authority, and all decision and policy makers, to exert every effort in order to enforce the necessary legislation and take every necessary measure to protect Christians in all the countries of the Middle East and around the world.

12-In this regard, the General Assembly also calls upon all the adherents of the three monotheistic religions to interact with each other in the spirit of love – in thought and in deed. The principles of common serious dialogue between

followers of all religions ought to be respected and put into practice. It endorses and asserts the need to continue with all dialogue initiatives currently taking place between Christians and Muslims, whether on the level of every-day life or within the context of institutions and dialogue centers.

13-Muslims and Christians in the Middle East have journeyed together as sisters and brothers for many decades, and we shall continue to do so. Together we stand before God Almighty in the service of the people of our region and of the world; but also in service of our societies who are currently experiencing fundamental political and constitutional changes. We strongly urge that the principles of equal citizenship shall be incorporated into the emerging constitutions and *effectively applied* on the ground in all our countries.

14-As the Middle East Council of Churches brings its General Assembly to a close, it wishes again to thank his Beatitude the Archbishop of Cyprus and to endorse what he said in his opening speech to the Assembly. We join him in calling for the unity of the Island of Cyprus and for respect and protection of the basic human rights and freedoms of its inhabitants, but in particular the right of religious practice and worship, and the preservation of the ancient and historic churches and monasteries on the Island that have been destroyed or desecrated.

15-Finally, the Assembly extends its thanks to the outgoing General Secretary, the presidents, the members of the Executive Committee and the staff who have faithfully labored for the preservation of MECC in the past four years.

16-As our Churches prepare to celebrate the feast of the nativity of our Lord Jesus Christ in the flesh, we assert our hope for our region and for the whole world. We leave the Assembly inspired by the chant of the angelic host on Christmas night: ***“Glory to God in the highest, peace on earth***

and hope to all people of good will."

Chief Secretary's Office

BREACH OF PILGRIMAGE STATUS BY THE ARMENIANS IN THE CAVE OF THE NATIVITY IN BETHLEHEM

On Saturday, October 16th / 29th 2011, His Holy Beatitude our Father and Patriarch of Jerusalem Theophilos, escorted by the Elder Dragoman Holy Metropolitan of Eleftheroupolis Christodoulos and His Eminence Elder Chief Secretary Archbishop of Constantina Aristarchus went to Bethlehem.

There at our priory/hegoumeneio He met with His Eminence Patriarchal Vicar in Bethlehem Archbishop of Jordan Theophilaktos and with the Custodian of the Franciscan Holy Land F. Pierbattista Pizzaballa, F. Athanasius Makora and the abbot of the Franciscans in Bethlehem F. Stephen and all together descended to the Cave that accepted God.

Here they inspected wear, that is scrapes in the marble joints on the ground and removal of marble parts, caused by the Armenians arbitrarily on October 27th/ 28th 2011, on the floor, to the repairs, which had been made by the Orthodox and the Franciscan the previous day , 26th / 27th October 2011.

This act of the Orthodox and the Franciscan was conducted, as in past occasions, in accordance with their agreement, having as entitled the right to take this action in the Cave that accepted God according to the pilgrimage status.

This act by the Armenians, that is scraping with a tool and cleaning the plaster from the cracks of the broken marbles and removing these pieces was done by contravention of the pilgrimage status since according to this status they do not have any rights to repairing or cleaning in the Cave that has accepted God other than their right to use it to conduct their Liturgy.

After this inspection, the Orthodox and the Franciscan agreed to proceed to the necessary actions and protests for the prevention of the consequences of this arbitrary action of the Armenians aiming at the distortion of the pilgrimage status through the acquisition of non-vested pilgrimage rights.

Chief Secretary's Office

(translated from the original document in Greek by Mrs. Irini Valasi)

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THE PATRIARCHATE CONDEMNS THE DESECRATION OF THE CEMETERIES IN IOPPE

Jerusalem, 9-10-2011

The Patriarchate of Jerusalem, the first Christian Church of the Holy Land, fostered through the centuries interfaith dialogue based on equality and mutual respect as well as supported the indiscriminate cohabitation and cooperation of

the Jewish, the Christians and the Muslims.

Continuing Its conciliatory and peacekeeping mission, the Patriarchate condemns the actions of desecration, which have recently been done by an individual whose identity remains unknown to the detriment and damage of the Christian and Muslim Cemetery in Ioppe.

The Patriarchate hopes the investigations of the Israeli Police to discover the culprits will bring the expected results, for the sake of prevalence of Justice, Freedom of Religion and Peace at the holy Land.

Chief Secretary's Office

(translated from the original document in Greek by Mrs Irini Valasi)

THE 'RUSSIAN PILGRIM CENTRE' ON THE JORDAN RIVER.

On the websites of the Patriarchate of Russia and of the Russian Ecclesiastical Mission in Jerusalem, articles were posted on the 6th and 8th of July 2011, relating to the construction of the so called "Russian Pilgrim Centre" in the area east of the Baptismal place of the Lord on the Jordan river. (<http://www.rusdm.ru/index.php?item=582> , <http://www.mospat.ru/ru/2011/07/08/news44496>).

This publication reports that this Centre has been erected on land that the Jordanian Government ceded to the Russian

Federation in February 2007, on the occasion of the official visit to Jordan of the President of Russia Mr. V. Putin. In March 2008 the foundation stone of the aforementioned Centre was laid and the inauguration of this building is planned for the coming autumn.

As a pretext to this publication, The Patriarchate of Jerusalem, by entitlement as the pastoral Church of the Holy Places, elucidated today that, from the onset of the respective project it stated that; it considers the Russian Pilgrim Centre to be a hostel for pilgrims, without a church or a chapel and not a Metochion (Patvoria), as twice mentioned in the above publication in contrast to the canon, since no arrangement had been made regarding a Metochion. This clarification is made for the sake of safeguarding the Ecclesiastical order and the preservation of the Status Quo of the Holy Places, contributing to the harmonious ecclesiastical cooperation and the unity in Christ within the bond of peace.

Chief Secretary's Office.

PRONOUNCEMENT TO THE PILGRIMS REGARDING THE DAY OF THE HOLY SATURDAY.

In view of the day of the Holy Saturday on the 23rd of April 2011 and of the Ceremony of the Holy Fire, the Patriarchate of Jerusalem announces to the pious pilgrims for their information and assistance, that according to the Israeli Police statements and measures:

1. Very early in the morning, as from 6.00 am o'clock (summer time) the pilgrims will have free access and can arrive for the Holy Liturgy and the Holy Communion at the Monasteries of: Saints Theodores, the Archangels, Great Panagia, Saint Panteleimon, Seidanaya, Saint Spiridon, Saint Charalambos and Saints Constantine and Helen (the service at the Saints Constantine & Helen will initiate at later time, at 8.00a.m (summer time) and thus it will not facilitate any pilgrims to attend the Ceremony of the Holy Fire in due time at the Church of Resurrection). The Managers of travel agencies are advised to consult the Superiors of the above Monasteries and enquire if they will perform the Holy Liturgy on Saturday morning in order for the pilgrims to receive the Holy Communion.

2. After the end of the aforementioned service, the pilgrims who wish to enter into the Church of Resurrection will follow the directions of the Police to proceed to the outer side of the walls to the Gate of David (Jaffa Gate), in groups and under the guidance of their travel agent. From that point, they will proceed via Dabagah and Mouristan towards the Church of Resurrection.

3. From 6:00 a.m. on Saturday morning the Central Monastery of the Brotherhood of the Holy Sepulchre will have its entrance free of access for locals and pilgrims in order to stay therein, but not to pass through the courtyard of Saint Jacob to the Holy Courtyard of the Church of Resurrection.

4. Official Delegations will arrange their arrival to the Church of Resurrection in deliberation with the Police.

**From the Chief Secretariat of the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate
of Jerusalem**

Holy Wednestay, 2011

THE PATRIARCHATE SUPPORTS ITS REPRESENTATIVE AND HIS FLOCK IN GAZA.

The Patriarchate of Jerusalem expresses its full support to its Representative in Gaza His Eminence Alexios Archbishop of Tiberias and to the Arabic speaking Rum-Orthodox flock in his care, regarding the recent incidents at the Church of Saint Porphyrios in Gaza. According to the information provided by the Patriarchate's Representative, these incidents were caused by some youths belonging to a family which inhabits a room in the premises of this Church. These youths threatened the Representative, pushed him and violently slammed his door whilst refusing to comply with the court decision commanding them to relinquish the room which they inhabit.

The Patriarchate of Jerusalem, whilst expressing its concern over the posed threat, is however convinced that the legislative and governmental authorities of Gaza will continue to show the same judicious judgment that has been shown since the signing of the Ahtiname between the late Patriarch of Jerusalem Sophronios and Caliph Omar Hatab, so that Christians and Muslims will continue to live within Gaza in harmony and cooperation.

Chief Secretary's Office.

ANNOUNCEMENT REGARDING MONK IRINEOS.

On April 23^d / May 6th of the year 2005 the Holy and Sacred Synod of the Patriarchate of Jerusalem, in accordance with the canons of the Eastern Orthodox Church and the Law of the Patriarchate, proclaimed Patriarch Irineos as having been demoted from the Office of the Patriarch of Jerusalem. However, due to the continuing uncanonical [irregular] actions of the demoted Patriarch Irineos, the Holy and Sacred Synod, conforming to the dictates of the Canonical Law of the Orthodox Church, formed and convened a twelve member Prelatic Court on the 16th of June of the same year (2005) which removed former Patriarch Irineos from the priorate of His Beatitude and restored him to the rank of the monks. Monk Irineos is not being held prisoner but has chosen, of his own free volition, to enclose himself within the building compound of the Patriarchate. Furthermore, the Patriarchate is also a monastic site and, as with other Holy Churches of the world, has laws and canons to which all priests that belong to the Brotherhood of the Holy Sepulchre have to adhere without exception. Monk Irineos does not comply with the canons of the Church and insists on projecting himself as the Patriarch, usurping the title and the office of the legal Patriarch of Jerusalem, His Beatitude Theophilos III, whilst refusing to recognize the jurisdiction of the Holy and Sacred Synod of the Patriarchate of Jerusalem and the spiritual authority of the power of the current and present Patriarch, Theophilos III.

Even though the aforementioned monk, former Patriarch of Jerusalem Irineos, insistently refuses to recognize the legal Patriarch of Jerusalem, Theophilos III, the Patriarchate, via

the guidance of His Beatitude Patriarch of Jerusalem Theophilos III, has made every endeavour to include monk Irineos in the distribution of food/meals which it provides to all members of the Patriarchate. Monk Irineos dismisses it and continues to refuse the meals which are provided by the Patriarchate. He insists on taking care of his own nutritional matters and to choose for himself the means by which he eats.

From the Press Office of the Patriarchate of Jerusalem in Greece.

THE PRESIDENT OF THE PALESTINIAN AUTHORITY VISITS THE CHURCH OF THE NATIVITY IN BETHLEHEM.

On Monday, 11th / 25th of October 2010, the President of the Palestinian Authority His Excellency Mr. Mahmoud Abbas – Abu Mazen visited the Church of the Nativity in Bethlehem along with his colleagues. The President of the Palestinian Authority was received at the forecourt of the Church of the Nativity by the Superiors of this Church belonging to the Three Communities namely His Eminence Theophylactos Archbishop of Jordan of our Patriarchate, Father Stephanos of the Franciscans, and Father Hat of the Armenians. Inside the Church he was received by His Beatitude Patriarch of Jerusalem Theophilos III as the representative of the Orthodox and Patriarch of the first Church in the Holy Land. The Greek Orthodox Patriarchate of Jerusalem has the exclusive ownership

and the right of worship in the Church of Nativity.

The reason for this visit of the President was the observation of the initiated restoration work on the roof of the Church which has been brought into fruition by the Palestinian Authority as the sovereign government of the region. This is since the Roman Catholics and the Armenians refused to allow the Orthodox their right to engage in the restoration process even though the Orthodox Church has most of the rights on the Church, if not all.

Since the 18th century, the Patriarchate accepts the solution of the repairs being done by the government in power at that time so as not to yield to the solution where the aforementioned other two Communities would partake on equal terms, as something that is unfair and unjust compared to its (of the Patriarchate) centuries old inalienable rights on the Church of Nativity and resulting to the violation of the prevailing Status Quo.

After the visit of the President, His Beatitude and His escort attended a dinner offered by the Patriarchal Representative in Bethlehem, His Eminence Theophylactos Archbishop of Jordan.

Chief Secretary's Office.

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MEETING OF THE ORTHODOX PATRIARCHS OF THE MIDDLE EAST

AND OF THE ARCHBISHOP OF CYPRUS IN NICOSIA.

Between the 2nd / 15th and the 3rd / 16th of September 2010, a meeting between His Beatitude Theodoros Patriarch of Alexandria, His Beatitude Ignatios Patriarch of Antioch, His Beatitude Theophilos III Patriarch of Jerusalem and His Beatitude Chrysostomos Archbishop of Cyprus took place in Nicosia.

The Heads of the Patriarchates and of the Church of Cyprus were escorted as follows; His Beatitude Patriarch of Jerusalem Theophilos III escorted by the representative of the Patriarchate in Cyprus His Eminence Timotheos Metropolitan of Vostron; the Elder Chief Secretary His Eminence Aristarchos Archbishop of Constantina, and His Eminence Dorotheos Archbishop of Avila. His Beatitude Ignatios Patriarch of Antioch escorted by His Eminence Loukas Metropolitan of Seidanayias and the Chief Secretary Rev. Archimandrite Father Ibrahim Daoud; His Beatitude Patriarch of Alexandria Theodoros escorted by His Eminence Georgios Metropolitan of Zimbabwe and His Eminence Nicolaos Metropolitan of Hermopolis; and His Beatitude Archbishop of Cyprus Chrysostomos escorted by the assistant Bishop of Carpasia Christoforos and the Coadjutor Archimandrite Father Ieronymos.

Upon the arrival of the dignitaries at Larnaca airport on the morning of Wednesday, the 2nd / 15th of September 2010, they were received by His Beatitude Archbishop of Cyprus Chrysostomos. His Beatitude Patriarch of Alexandria Theodoros arrived during the evening on this day.

The aforementioned dignitaries met in their capacity as Representatives of the Orthodox Churches of the Middle East in

the Council of Churches of the Middle East (CCME) as it is known. In this Council, four so called "families" take part, that is the families of the Orthodox, the Pre-Chalcedonian, the Latins and the Protestants. His Beatitude Patriarch of Jerusalem Theophilos III is the President of the family of the Orthodox which includes the Patriarchates of Alexandria, of Antioch, and Jerusalem and also the Archdiocese of Cyprus for the current four year term.

Upon their arrival at Larnaca airport, the Dignitaries gave a brief interview. Firstly the Archbishop of Cyprus expressed His joy at receiving the Dignitaries in order to discuss subjects that will assist and that will be of benefit to the Christians of the Churches of the Middle East. Then the Patriarch of Antioch stated that he is particularly delighted about His meeting with the Patriarch of Jerusalem Theophilos III for the first time and, furthermore, that this meeting will contribute towards the solution of problems that beset the Christians of the Middle East. Finally, His Beatitude Patriarch of Jerusalem Theophilos III explained that the purpose of this meeting is to tackle, primarily, the problem of the crisis which currently assails the CCME and also the status of the Christians in the Middle East.

Concerning the first topic, they held a meeting on the morning of Wednesday, the 2nd / 15th of September 2010, with the representatives of the Orthodox family of the CCME at the Hilton Park Hotel, where they were also lodged by the kind and polite gesture of the Holy Archdiocese of Cyprus.

At noon on this day, His Beatitude Archbishop of Cyprus Chrysostomos hosted dinner for all of the representatives of the CCME that came to the Archdiocese.

During the course of the meal His Beatitude Patriarch of Jerusalem Theophilos III thanked the Archbishop of Cyprus for His kind hospitality and for the support offered by the Archdiocese of Cyprus to the CCME and congratulated Him on the

recent ratification by the Government of Cyprus of the Charter of the Church of Cyprus.

In the evening on this day a meeting of the Presidents of the four families, namely His Beatitude Patriarch of Jerusalem Theophilos III, the Most Reverend Armenian Catholic Patriarch of Cilicia Aram Kisisian, the representative of the PreChalkedonian Churches, the Most Reverend Maronite Metropolitan of Beirut Boutros Matar, a representative of the Latin family, and a representative of the Protestant church the Most Reverend Bishop of the Lutherans in Jerusalem Mounib Yunan took place in a hall at the Hilton Park Hotel where the representatives were lodged.

After an intensive discussion they decided that the efforts for the redress, reestablishment and strengthening of the CCME as a union of expression of justice and peace in the Middle East and of support of the status of the Christians should be continued. Furthermore the mission and deed should be continued with the Coptic Church, which is expected to be reconnected with the CCME. The General Assembly of the Council will be convened in Cyprus around the end of February 2011. These decisions by the four Presidents were relegated, according to the bylaws of the CCME, to its Executive Committee, which will convene on the 24th of September of the current year in Damascus.

Following this, a meeting between His Beatitude Patriarchate of Jerusalem Theophilos III, His escorts, and the representative of the Patriarchate in Cyprus, His Eminence Timotheos Metropolitan of Vostron took place concerning matters of property of the Patriarchate in Cyprus.

Later, His Beatitude Theodoros Patriarch of Alexandria and the whole of Africa arrived at the hotel, accompanied by His Eminence Georgios Metropolitan of Zimbabwe and His Eminence Nikolaos Metropolitan of Hermopolis.

His Beatitude Archbishop of Cyprus Chrysostomos hosted a banquet dinner for all the dignitaries and their escorts at their lodging hotel.

On the morning of Thursday, the 3rd / 16th of September, the Heads of the three Primal Patriarchates visited the Archdiocese of Cyprus where His Beatitude Archbishop of Cyprus Chrysostomos cordially welcomed them.

There, between the Heads of the three Patriarchates and their representatives, as well as His Eminence Nikolaos Bishop of Amathus, representative of the Church of Cyprus to the European Union, and the Reverend Father Ioannis, representative in the CCME, an intensive discussion took place regarding the causes of the financial and administrative crisis of the Council of Churches of the Middle East (CCME) and the measures which are warranted in order to overcome this crisis. As one means of assistance, it was proposed to accept the offer from the Archdiocese of (the Church of) Cyprus of the premises to house the offices of the CCME in Cyprus and to accommodate their Secretarial personnel together with the offer of hospitality for all meetings of Council representatives whenever and as often as they take place in Cyprus. Likewise, the insistence on the convening of the General Assembly as agreed and the determination of the Orthodox Churches to continue to take an active part in and to confront the problems of the Churches which they represent in unanimity, and to contribute to their spiritual progress and the amelioration of their terms of life, was highlighted and emphasized.

During this meeting the three Primuses paid particular attention to the status of Christians in Israel, Palestine, the Holy Land and, generally in the Middle East, as well as to Christians' problems, the expatriations, the emigration, the education, their coexistence and their symbiosis with adherents of other religions. It was decided to bring into

effect the cooperation between the Churches of the Orthodox family, but also the Churches of the other three families of CCME, for the purpose of helping and assisting the Christians whom the various Churches represent.

This help will be delivered through the improvement of the level of the schools already in existence via the establishment of new ones and the granting of scholarships to young Christians either for studies at Universities in the Holy Land or at institutions abroad on the condition that, upon completion of their studies, they will return for employment to their birth place. Furthermore, Christians will be offered assistance through their Churches with the creation of jobs and via the establishment of works projects with funding from the European Union and other organizations.

At the close of this meeting, the Dignitaries gave an interview to the Cypriot Media, the communiqué is as follows:

The Primuses of the three Primal Patriarchates of Alexandria, Antioch and Jerusalem Their Beatitudes Patriarchs Theodoros, Ignatios and Theophilos III met by themselves in Cyprus following the initiative and the invitation of His Beatitude Archbishop of Cyprus Chrysostomos. They discussed ways and concrete measures in order to resolve the problems and overcome the crisis of the Council of Churches of the Middle East, so that the Council will be able to continue to deservedly fulfill the purpose of its establishment, that is to support the Christians in Jerusalem, Palestine and the wider Middle East and, simultaneously, to continuously strive for peaceful coexistence and symbiosis of Christians amongst the people of the region and for the prevalence of a just and peaceful solution in the Middle East, Jerusalem, the Holy Land and on the martyred island of Cyprus.

The Heads held a private meeting the central subject of which was the status of Christians in the Middle East.

During the afternoon of the last day of the visit in Cyprus, His Beatitude Patriarch of Jerusalem Theophilos III along with His Beatitude Archbishop of Cyprus Chrysostomos and His escorts went from the Archdiocese of Cyprus to the area nearby where the Hexarchy of the Patriarchate of Jerusalem was situated and where it will be reestablished and will be erected. The current representative of the Patriarchate at the Exarchate is His Eminence Timotheos Metropolitan of Vostra.

After this visit His Beatitude Theophilos III Patriarch of Jerusalem along with His escorts returned via Cyprus Airways to Tel-Aviv airport and from there to the Patriarchate of Jerusalem.

Chief Secretary's Office.

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ARRANGEMENTS IN VIEW OF THE HOLY FIRE CEREMONY (2010)

The day of Holy Saturday with the ceremony of the Holy Fire is in the cycle of feasts of the Patriarchate of Jerusalem as one of the holiest, most emotionally moving and consequently, most participated in by numerous pilgrims.

On this day from the early hours of dawn the pilgrims from every direction, eagerly arrive in crowds in front of the gates of the Church of Resurrection, which are closed until 10:30 am (summer time) according to the Status Quo.

In avoiding dangerous congestion or trampling accidents from the crowd, the Israeli Police take strict measures for crowd control which not only makes movement of the people difficult but indeed also for the Patriarchate's clergymen, even for those responsible for the ceremonial order of the Holy Fire.

The Patriarchate of Jerusalem considering the care of its guests and pilgrims, and taking into serious consideration the complaints made by them and the tourist agents, repeatedly over the past years, including this one, held meetings with the Israeli Police to petition for the free access of pilgrims to the Patriarchate Road, to the Christian Road and to the Convent church of the Brotherhood namely that of Saints Constantine and Helen, and for the removal of Police iron-railing barriers.

The Police replied explaining that if these facilitations were implemented, the lives of pilgrims would be at risk and would deem the descent of His Beatitude to the Church of Resurrection on Holy Saturday for the ceremony of the Holy Fire, as impossible.

From the proposals put forth by the Patriarchate, the Police finally agreed to allow free access into the Patriarchate premises only for those who wear a cassock; Archbishops, fathers, monks and nuns and a limited number of lay pilgrims.

According to the changes recommended by the Police, the lay pilgrims are called upon either individually or as a group with their travel agent to arrive at the Holy Sepulchre by the David's Gate and from the place known as Darbaga, market of Eftymios or Muristan between the Monastery of Saint John the Forerunner and the Lutheran church. Either they should enter from Damascus Gate via the Main Street of the market and through the small eastern gate of the Courtyard of the Church

of Resurrection adjacent to the 'Metohion'- Department of Gethsemane.

This means that the Police, despite the recommendations of the Patriarchate, will not allow the movement of pilgrims along the Christian Road, the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate Road nor the arrival at the Holy Sepulchre from the Brotherhood's Convent (the Patriarchate) through the Cathedral Church of Saint James, the first Bishop of Jerusalem.

The pilgrims will be able to attend the morning ceremony on Holy Saturday at 5:00am or 6:00am (summer time) and take Holy Communion. They should ask if the Holy Liturgy will be performed at: the Holy Monastery of Panagias Seidanayas, Monastery of the Archangels, Monastery of Saints Theodores, Monastery of Saint Panteleimon and the Holy Monastery of Great Panayias and then proceed afterwards to the Church of Resurrection through the aforementioned designated streets.

Fathers and Representatives of the Patriarchate, members of its Arab-speaking flock from the State of Israel and the Palestinian Authority, should arrive to receive the Holy Fire on Holy Saturday, at New Gate at 10am, where they will be received by Mr. Anton Bullata (tel.00972 547602166) and the Police, and from whence they will be escorted to the Courtyard of the Church of Resurrection.

The members of the congregation of Saint James will also gather at New Gate at 10am and be received by the Muhtar (the Community Leader) and the Police. They will be escorted through the Central Monastery (Patriarchate) to their Cathedral church for the Holy Liturgy and the Holy Communion. From the Cathedral of Saint James they will not be permitted to pass into the Courtyard of the Church of Resurrection. The Police also mentioned that those Community Representatives of

the Patriarchate and the members of the Cathedral of Saint James who arrive late, after 10am at New Gate, will not be granted access to the Church of Resurrection.

Entry to the Patriarchate and to its Convent Church of Saints Constantine and Helen will not be possible through the Christian Road, but instead via the street situated above that of the Archangels street, the Casa Nova hotel and the Polyclinic.

The Archbishops of sister Orthodox Churches, representatives of Consulates and Embassies of Orthodox States to Israel and to the Palestinian Authority who arrive at the level and in the context of Delegations are asked to arrange beforehand their arrival to the Patriarchate and to the Church of Resurrection by consulting the Police Station of David's Gate.

The Patriarchate has done whatever possible in appealing to the Israeli Police to facilitate devout pilgrims. The Patriarchate publishes this on its official website, and through the Travel Agencies to inform the pilgrims and make their access easier to the Church of Resurrection and their participation at the ceremony of the Holy Fire on the day of Holy Saturday.

Chief Secretary's Office

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