

# STATEMENT IN RELATION TO THE PROPERTIES OF JAFFA GATE

*Holy City of Jerusalem, 5<sup>th</sup> August 2019.*

The Orthodox Patriarchate of Jerusalem views the attempts of the radical organization, Ateret Cohanim, to seize church properties located in Jerusalem's Jaffa Gate and al-Mu'athamiyah, as a strike to the indigenous Christian presence in the Holy City. The Patriarchate affirms that changing the Status Quo in the Old City of Jerusalem, especially in Jaffa Gate; being the main entrance to the various Patriarchates and to the pilgrim route to the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, threatens the continuous hundreds-of-years old mosaic and balance that shores the good relations between Jerusalemites of different faiths.

The Patriarchate stresses that its properties located within the walls of Old City Jerusalem are for the service of pilgrims and visitors of the Holy City especially those on the pilgrim route to the Church of the Holy Sepulchre. The Patriarchate will continue to exercise its right and duty of defending itself, the holy sites and the Church heritage.

After the Israeli High Court of Justice wrongly rejected the Patriarchate's appeal on the decision of the District Court, which approved the dubious transactions involving the above mentioned properties, and true to our belief that justice shall always prevail, the Patriarchate and through its legal advisers and lawyers, succeeded in obtaining unequivocal evidence that proves the voidance of the transactions and the corrupt nature of the deals, that His Beatitude Patriarch of Jerusalem Theophilos III has rejected along with the brotherhood of the Holy Sepulchre in addition to the rejection

of those deals by all of the Jerusalem Churches as per their joint statements issued in 2017 as well as on 12<sup>th</sup> June 2019.

Among evidence attained by the Patriarchate are documents dating back to 1996 showing that the radical's financial supporter, billionaire and financier Irving Moskowitz, had reached an agreement with one of the tenants of the Petra Hotel to buy the protected lease rights for \$ 4.5 million, in addition to his willingness to pay for other expenses as well as the adjacent "Little Petra Hotel". This is a clear proof of the corruption of the suspicious deals of 2004, since it is unreasonable to agree to buy the tenants' "protected lease rights" for \$ 4.5 million in 1996, while 9 years later (in 2004) to claim to have purchased from the Patriarchate (the owner of the properties) the property itself, including a further hostel, being the "Little Petra Hotel", for a mere half a million \$.

The Patriarchate also discovered that Ateret Cohanim, through its officer Mati Dan, used to pay bribes to "manage their affairs" in connection to the church properties. These efforts coincided with local civic authorities, such as the Municipality of Jerusalem and the local Tax Authority, imposing arbitrary measures against tenants of the church properties resulting in the weakening of their position.

The new evidence that the Patriarchate has obtained, confirm that Ateret Cohanim and its companies forged documents and initiated court proceedings based on these forged documents, despite Ateret Cohanim's knowledge that they were forged. The evidence shows that the suspicious deals of 2004 involved bribes by Ateret Cohanim, and all indications point to the bribes being paid to the then Patriarchate employee, Nicholas Papadimas.

The Patriarchate notes that the new evidence includes documents signed by leaders of the radical organization Ateret Cohanim, as well as audio recordings by its managing director

Mati Dan and advocate Eitan Geva, that prove that they lied and concealed facts during the legal proceedings in court.

Following receipt of this new evidence, the legal advisors of the Patriarchate worked relentlessly to examine, revise and evaluate this evidence. The legal advisors concluded that the new evidence obtained by the Patriarchate, following the decision of the High Court of Justice in favour of the radical Ateret Cohanim, should prompt the Court to reconsider its decision.

Based on the above, and despite the fact that the planned legal action by the Patriarchate is rare and difficult, and despite the fact that the judicial proceedings regarding the above mentioned properties have exhausted the Patriarchate for a decade and a half, the Orthodox Patriarchate of Jerusalem considers the Old City of Jerusalem a "red line" and the core of the Christian belief, and the Patriarchate pledges that it will defend these principles and reclaim its' properties; whether through judicial or diplomatic efforts, and in cooperation with the promoters of peace, joined by Christians around the world, protecting the Church heritage at the doors of the Holy Sepulchre and in the heart of the Christian Quarter.

Accordingly, the Orthodox Patriarchate of Jerusalem announces that today it has filed a new lawsuit, against the radical "Ateret Cohanim" organisation and its companies, in order to overturn the decision of the court, which ratified the ominous deals of the properties of Jaffa Gate and al-Mu'athameya, by exposing the practices of fraud, deception and bribery involved in those unauthorised property transactions.

The Patriarchate calls upon the Heads of States and Heads of Churches around the world as well as on all those who strive for peace and justice in the Holy Land, to protect the historic and legal doctrine of the "Status Quo", relating to the Holy Shrines, and to defend the Holy Sites from all

underhanded and immoral dealings.

**From Secretariat-General**

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# **TONSURE OF A NEW MONK AT THE PATRIARCHATE**

The monk's tonsure of the novice and helper of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre Basil took place at the Pentecost chapel in the Patriarchate on Thursday afternoon, July 19/ August 1, 2019.

The tonsure was performed by H.H.B. our Father and Patriarch of Jerusalem Theophilos at the presence of Geronda Sacristan Most Reverend Archbishop Isidoros of Hierapolis, Geronda Secretary-General Most Reverend Archbishop Aristarchos of Constantina, the Most Reverend Archbishop Methodios of Tabor, the Most Reverend Archbishop Demetrios of Lydda and Secretary of the Holy and Sacred Synod, the Most Reverend Metropolitan Joachim of Helenoupolis and other Hagiotaphite Fathers, the Archimandrites Bartholomew and Nectarios, and the ministering Fathers of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre. The newly tonsured Monk has kept the name of his baptism, Basil.

After the reading of the prayer for the monks and the completion of the tonsure, His Beatitude addressed the new Monk praising him for his humble and righteous service at the Church of the Holy Sepulchre and encouraging him to continue this service, following the example of St. Basil the Great, whose name he bears, and of his sister St. Makrina, whose commemoration we celebrate today.

**From Secretariat-General**

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# DEPARTURE FROM LIFE OF GERASIMOS THE HAGIOTAPHITE

The Hegoumen of the Holy Monastery of Sarantarion Mount Archimandrite Gerasimos Selalmatzidis died on Tuesday morning, July 17/30, 2019, at the Holy Monastery of St. Gerasimos of the Jordan, where he was especially treated for his old age in the last few months, by the care of the Patriarchate and the diligence of the Hegoumen Archimandrite Chrysostom.

The deceased, genuine Hagiotaphite, joined the Hagiotaphite Brotherhood as an adult, and having received the monastic schema and the office of Priesthood, he ministered in various posts of the Patriarchate and served as the Hegoumen of the Sarantarion Mount for many years. Living in the mountains and frugal in his diet, he offered the pilgrims' financial contributions and his own property for the full renovation of the Monastery of the Sarantarion Mount and of that of St. John the Baptist in the river Jordan.

His funeral service, in the afternoon of his departure day, was officiated by H.H.B. our Father and Patriarch of Jerusalem Theophilos, with the participation of Hagiotaphite Archbishops, Monks and laity. The requiem was read by Geronda Secretary-General Most Reverend Archbishop Aristarchos of Constantina as follows;

“Your Beatitude Father and Master,

Reverend Fathers,

Beloved Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

The departure from life of our beloved Brother in Christ

Archimandrite Gerasimos, Hegoumen of the Holy Monastery of Sarantaron Mount, reminded us St. Paul words; "For here have we no continuing city, but we seek one to come" (Hebrews 13:14). And "ourselves and one another and all our lives" should be aligned and directed to the final coming of the Kingdom of Heaven which has been granted to us through Jesus Christ, Who became Incarnate, was Crucified and Resurrected. Through His Cross and Resurrection death has no longer dominion over us. This salvific and hopeful message in Christ drew the soul of the deceased, our Brother Archimandrite Gerasimos.

He came to the Holy Land in an adult age from his hometown Thessalonica, and joined the Patriarchate of Jerusalem and the Hagiotaphite Brotherhood, he received the Priesthood, served the Department of Finance with financial transparency, and having been a mountain climber, he was called by our Lord Jesus Christ to minister at Sarantaron Mount in harsh conditions, where the Lord was tempted and conquered all temptations, comforting us and giving us courage to conquer our temptations. He served there for many years, and being frugal, he offered all the financial contributions he received from the pilgrims for the full renovation of the Holy Monastery of Sarantaron Mount and the restoration of the Holy Monastery of St. John the Baptist by the river Jordan. We entreat the Lord that He may consider these good works and forgive him for any sins he may have committed as human, and place him in the land of the living, along with the righteous ones, filling him with the His Trinitarian Light.

The Hagiotaphite Brotherhood thanks those who honored his memory for their participation at his funeral and the Hegoumen of the Holy Monastery of St. Gerasimos, Archimandrite Chrysostom, because of the care he offered the deceased with devotion, over the last few months of his life.

May his memory be ever-lasting!"

The Hagiotaphite Brotherhood expresses its condolences to his relatives in the world.

May his memory be ever-lasting!

**From Secretariat-General**

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## **THE VISIT OF THE MINISTER OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS OF GREECE AT THE PATRIARCHATE**

The Minister of Foreign Affairs of Greece Mr. Nikolaos Dendias, on his one-day trip to Israel, on Sunday afternoon, July 15/28, 2019, visited the Patriarchate escorted by a team of his associates among whom the former Ambassador in Israel Mr. Loukakis and the former Attache' of the Embassy Mr. Gennimatas, with the Ambassador of Greece in Tel-Aviv Mr. Elias Eliadis and the Consul General of Greece in Jerusalem Mr. Christos Sophianopoulos.

His Excellency the Minister and his escorts were warmly received by H.H.B. our Father and Patriarch of Jerusalem Theophilos and Hagiotaphite Fathers.

In this meeting His Beatitude honoured Mr. Dendias with the honorary distinction of the Grand Commander of the Order of Knights of the Holy Sepulchre in recognition of his contribution to the nation, to the Church, and especially to the Church of Jerusalem, addressing him as follows;

“Your Excellency Minister of Foreign Affairs of Greece Mr. Nikolaos Dendias,

The Hagiotaphite Brotherhood our Brotherhood of the Holy Sepulchre and We personally welcome you and your associates in great joy today at the Venerable Patriarchate of Jerusalem.

Your visit within the framework of the political, economic and energy cooperation of Greece with the Eastern Mediterranean states including Israel, is of great importance not only for the security and peace of the region but also for the preservation of the existing political, demographic and religious Status Quo of the Old City of Jerusalem, which has been recognized by all peoples and all religions without distinction as a Holy and Sacred City.

And we say this, because the Venerable Patriarchate of Jerusalem, known as the Rum Orthodox Patriarchate of Jerusalem, is an indisputable factor in the so far undisturbed multi-cultural and multi-religious character of the Holy City.

Needless to say, that the Patriarchate of Jerusalem, which the Divine Providence has appointed for the preservation and ministry of the Shrines of the Sacred History throughout the centuries, continues to remain the guarantor of the Christian character of Jerusalem which is considered the spiritual capital of the world.

In this capacity as the guarantor of the Christian character and indeed of the Christian field of the Old City of Jerusalem, our Patriarchate, representing the pious nation of the Orthodox faithful of Romiosyne but also our nation as a whole, makes an appeal, together with the other Christian Communities and Churches, to His Excellency the Prime Minister of Greece Mr. Kyriakos Mitsotakis and to you personally Mr. Minister, to make every effort to encourage His Excellency Prime Minister Mr. Benjamin Netanyahu, in order to execute a resolution to the matter of our Church properties in Jaffa Gate and prevent the forcible take over, by unlawful means, of the well-known Imperial and Petra hotels by the radical group Ateret Cohanim.



Resting assured of the undivided support of our Respected Greek Government, Mr. Minister we would like you to accept the Honorary Distinction of the Grand Commander of the Order of the Studious Ones, namely of the Hagiotaphite Brotherhood.

This is a token of our gratitude to the Greek people and to their Governments and to our Ministry of Foreign Affairs, as well as to its diplomatic representatives who are present here.

Thank you.”

Emotional, the Minister thanked His Beatitude and committed himself to continue his work for the benefit of the Church and of Hellenism.

His Beatitude moreover offered the Minister and to the members of his team an icon of the Theotokos of Jerusalem and of the Sacred Edicule of the Holy Sepulchre and gave His blessing for the success of his new Governmental mission and the Minister offered His Beatitude a silver souvenir of Mecedonian origin in return.

**From Secretariat-General**

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## **LIFTING OF THE DEGRADATION OF MONK EIRINAIOS (FORMER PATRIARCH OF JERUSALEM)**

The Holy and Sacred Synod of the Patriarchate of Jerusalem, Chaired by H.H.B. our Father and Patriarch of Jerusalem Theophilos, at its 110<sup>th</sup> Meeting of July 12/25, 2019,

unanimously lifted the degradation of Monk Eirinaios and restored Him to the Episcopal Office, which he formerly held, and to the degree of the Former Patriarch of Jerusalem, attributing thus the full owed respect to His Office.

The Holy and Sacred Synod took this decision for the reasons mentioned in the following text:

“Because the enacted according to the rules continuing order of all things in the Church constructs and promotes peace, in which God’s Spirit, “which constitutes the institution of the Church” finds rest, and because the holy rules were enacted by the Holy Fathers “for the healing of the passions and the cure of the souls”, therefore also for the abolishment of any passionate and selfish action opposed to the unity of the body of the Church, the Holy and Sacred Synod of the Patriarchate of Jerusalem, following amenably the canonical orders, within the spirit of the aforementioned canonical principles, took the decision of the degradation of Patriarch of Jerusalem Eirinaios, in deep sorrow, fourteen years ago, and he had ever since been transferred to the order of Monks. Nevertheless, the Holy and Sacred Synod has never ceased to show a vivid interest in the well-being of the aforementioned brother of ours, with much patience, and for this reason it has unceasingly rendered interceding prayers to God for him.

Because the health condition of our brother in Christ has recently been deteriorating, the Holy and Sacred Synod, having considered the orders of God and acting philanthropically, according to the authority “which is held by the One who heals according to the science of Spiritual medicine” decides unanimously the lifting of the degradation that had been imposed on our brother Eirinaios, fervently praying to “the Lord of every principle and authority” to grant him and all of us the grace of the All-holy and Life-giving Tomb”.

The Holy and Sacred Synod delegated Geronda Secretary-General Most Reverend Archbishop Aristarchos of Constantina and the

Secretary of the Holy and Sacred Synod Most Reverend Archbishop Demetrios of Lydda to announce this decision to the former Patriarch Eirinaios, who under the care of the Patriarchate had recently been hospitalized at the French Hospital in Jerusalem and is currently being looked after at the Holy Monastery of Saint Gerasimos of the Jordan.

**From Secretariat-General**

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## **H.B. PATRIARCH THEOFILOS III HOLDS A SERIES OF MEETINGS IN WASHINGTON, D.C. DISCUSSING THE MATTER OF JAFFA GATE**

H.B. our Father and Patriarch Theophilos III, held a series of meetings with American politicians, religious and civil society leaders to raise awareness about the threats facing the Christian presence in the Holy Land, and particularly in Jerusalem. These risks have increased along with the increased probability of settlers taking over the properties of Jaffa Gate after the Supreme Court's wrongful decision to allow Ateret Cohanim organisation to do so.

H.B. Patriarch Theophilos III led a delegation from the Holy Land representing the three Church families (Orthodox, Catholic and Protestant families) to promote the concept of the Christian unity and the joint Christian action in the face of the challenges that beset the Christian presence in the Holy Land, while working at the same time to enrich the

interaction between the Churches of Jerusalem and the decision-makers in the US.

H.B. Theophilos III and the accompanying delegation participated in a conference of foreign ministers to promote religious freedom, which was held in Washington, D.C. with the participation of dozens of foreign ministers from all over the world. H.B. met with ministers and various political personalities, briefing them on the situation of Jerusalemites, and the state of the Christian and Muslim holy sites which suffer from violations at the hands of radical settler groups. Our Father and Patriarch also briefed the ministers on the latest developments regarding the properties of Jaffa Gate, urging them to encourage the Israeli government to conclude this file that poses an existential threat to Christians in Jerusalem.

H.B. Patriarch of Jerusalem, also met with officials in the White House, the State Department, the International Bureau of Religious Freedom, the USAID, and a large number of members of the Senate and House of Representatives, where he presented the importance of the Jaffa Gate properties and the impact they hold on the Christian presence in Jerusalem, and for the Christian pilgrims as well; for it being the main entrance to the Church of the Holy Sepulchre for hundreds of years, and also the main entrance to the Christian Quarter, the monasteries, and ecclesiastical institutions in general, as well. Patriarch Theophilos warned that the seizure by settlers of the Jaffa Gate properties will have catastrophic consequences for the Christians all over the world and not only Christians of the Holy Land.

Among the meetings of Patriarch Theophilos III in Washington, D.C. and the accompanying delegation, they met with leaders of civil society, specifically with heads of universities, to put them in the picture of what is going on in Jerusalem. Our Patriarch asked them to cooperate with the our Patriarchate of Jerusalem and the other Churches in Jerusalem; to raise

awareness within the American society about the dangers threatening the Christian presence and the attacks on the Christian and Islamic holy places.

**From Secretariat-General**

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## **H. B. THEOPHILOS III MEETS WITH U.S. CHURCH LEADERS OVER CHALLENGES TO CHRISTIANS' PRESENCE IN JERUSALEM**

His Beatitude our Father and Patriarch of Jerusalem Theophilos III, met in Washington D.C., with influential Church leaders in the United States of America to discuss means of supporting the authentic Christian presence in the Holy Land in general and in Jerusalem in particular.

H.B. considered the meeting itself as a positive step towards strengthening the International Community of the Holy Sepulchre organization [ICoHS], which is working to build and strengthen the bond of peace between Christians in the Holy Land and their brothers and sisters around the world.

H.B. Theophilos III presented updates on the Jaffa Gate Church properties (The Imperial and Petra Hotels) which make up the entrance to the Christian Quarter of Old Jerusalem. H.B. said: "The likely take-over of buildings there, by a radical group, if unabated, will undermine the integrity and compromise the Christian character of the Christian Quarter of the Old City of Jerusalem; it will further threaten the access of pilgrims and the local community to our Churches, schools, health

facilities and the Church of the Holy Sepulchre itself. This will indeed change the character of the Christian Quarter forever.”

H.B. our Father and Patriarch of Jerusalem, said that two years ago he was given an important mandate by fellow Church leaders in Jerusalem; adding: “I was tasked to engage political and religious leaders around the world concerning the challenges that Christians currently face in the Holy Land. As Church leaders we are as one, united both in the Spirit, and in crucial concern for the Church and our communities.” Furthermore, H.B. Theophilos III stressed that there is a clear and present challenge to the continued existence of the Christian community in the Holy Land, and only by strengthening the bonds of peace with “our brothers and sisters around the world will we be able to remove this existential threat in our beloved region.”

H.B. informed his audience that Christians in Jerusalem face multiple threats due to the fragile nature of politics which makes the Churches an easy target for politicians pursuing quick votes. He added “Against this political backdrop are practical problems, among them desecration and vandalism of Churches, and intimidation from radical groups.”

**From Secretariat-General**

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# **HIS BEATITUDE THE PATRIARCH OF JERUSALEM GIVES MEDAL AWARDS TO CHOIR MEMBERS OF THE COMMUNITY OF BEIT SAHOUR**

On the evening of the feast of the Ascension, May 24/ June 6, 2019, at the ceremony held at Paradise Hotel by Rachel's Tomb, which belongs to the Roum-Orthodox Christian Mr. Athanasios Abu-Aeta, His Beatitude our Father and Patriarch of Jerusalem gave medal awards to 7 choir members of the Community of Beit Sahour, who have been distinguished for a number of years for their keeping and cultivation of our traditional Byzantine Music. The ceremony was attended by the Consul General of Greece in Jerusalem Mr. Christos Sophianopoulos, Metropolitan Chrysostom of Patra, the Spiritual Father of St. Savvas the Sanctified Lavra Archimandrite Eudokimos, the Hegoumen of the Monastery of the Shepherds and of Beit Jalla Archimandrite Ignatios, Priest Issa Mousleh and Fr. Savvas Her, Priests of Beit Sahour Community and many members of the Beit Sahour Parish, and the relatives of the awarded with the distinction of the Order of the Cross Bearers of the Holy Sepulchre.

The awarded choir members, Mr. Hanna Judeh, Mr. Elias Andraos Banoura, Mr. Kareem Saliba Kokali, Mr. George Bassil Abu Etah, Mr. Raed Nasri Al Atrash, Mr. Khader Ibrahim Saeed, Mr. Zuneir Qumsieh, thanked His Beatitude and expressed their willingness to always support the Patriarchate and promote the studying of the angelic and heavenly Byzantine Music.

Thanking the host of the ceremony and Hotel owner, Mr. Abu Aeta, His Beatitude offered him an icon of the Theotokos of Jerusalem.

**From Secretariat-General**

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# **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**

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## **THE IMPERIAL PALESTINIAN SOCIETY DEPARTMENT PRESIDENTS VISITED THE PATRIARCHATE**

On Friday morning, May 4/17, 2019, approximately 20 Presidents of the Imperial Russian Palestinian Society from Russia and abroad, visited the Patriarchate, under the lead of Mr. Stepashin.

The group of representatives was received by H.H.B. our Father and Patriarch of Jerusalem Theophilos and Hagiotaphite Fathers.

In this meeting Mr. Stepashin thanked His Beatitude on behalf of the Society for yesterday's delegation with His Message at Sergei hotel, which was read by the Most Reverend Archbishop

Aristarchos of Constantina, and Secretary-General.

Mr. Stepashin furthermore informed His Beatitude on the activity of the Society for the help of the needy Christians of the Holy Land, and especially for the suffering Christians of Syria, and on the occasion of the completion of 200 years since the founding of the Society, offered Him the Supreme Award of the Society.

His Beatitude thanked Mr. Stepashin for the award and the briefing, and simultaneously informed him on the activities of the Patriarchate for the moral and material support and help it offers to the needy Christians of the Holy Land, as well as on the recent establishment of THE INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY OF THE HOLY SEPULCHRE (ICOHS), which serves the purpose of helping the preservation of the Status Quo in Jerusalem.

His Beatitude also referred to many other activities of the Patriarchate for the encouragement of the Christian presence in the Holy Land and concluded His words by offering Mr. Stepashin an embossed icon of Jerusalem, depicted in the centre of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, and to the members of the delegation He offered souvenirs from Jerusalem as blessings.

**From Secretariat-General**