

THE FEAST OF THE TRANSFIGURATION OF THE LORD AT THE PATRIARCHATE

On Thursday, 6/19 August 2021, the Feast of the Transfiguration of our Lord Jesus Christ was celebrated by the Patriarchate at the Holy Monastery of the Transfiguration on Mount Tabor, the place where this event happened.

On this Feast, the Church follows the Gospel narrative by which before His Passion, our Lord Jesus Christ took Peter, James and John, His Disciples, and revealed to them the Glory of His Divinity, as much as it was possible for them to comprehend. His face shone and his clothes were brighter than the sun, while a bright cloud overshadowed them and Moses and Elijah appeared next to Him, talking about His Passion, which was about to happen in Jerusalem. At the same time, the voice of the Father was heard from the heavens saying: "This is my beloved Son," in whom I am well pleased, hear ye Him". After this vision, Jesus again took His disciples and went down the mountain and told them not to tell anyone about what they had witnessed before His Resurrection.

For the commemoration of this event, by which the Lord revealed to His Disciples and to us the first beauty of man before Adam's fall, and the possibility to regain it through the Transfigured Christ, the Divine Liturgy was officiated in an All-night Vigil by H.H.B. our Father and Patriarch of Jerusalem Theophilos. Co-celebrants to His Beatitude were their Eminences; Metropolitan Kyriakos of Nazareth, Archbishop Aristarchos of Constantina, Archbishop Makarios of Qatar, Archimandrite Parthenios, and Priests from the Galilee district. The chanting was delivered by Archimandrite Philotheos and his choir in Greek and Arabic, as the Vigil was attended by the Consul General of Greece in Jerusalem Mr

Evangelos Vlioras, and not many faithful Christians due to the covid restrictions.

Before the Holy Communion His Beatitude delivered the following Sermon:

“And after six days Jesus taketh Peter, James, and John his brother, and bringeth them up into a high mountain apart, and was transfigured before them: and his face did shine as the sun, and his raiment was white as the light” (Matt. 17:1-2).

Beloved Brethren in Christ,
Noble Christians

The grace of our Saviour Christ has gathered us all in this high mountain of Tabor to celebrate the great and wondrous event of the utmost philanthropy of God the Father, namely the Transfiguration of Jesus before His Disciples, Peter, James and John, and also the prophets Moses and Elijah. This event happened forty days before Christ’s Passion.

Apostle Peter refers to the irrefutable witness of his presence on Mount Tabor when he wants to prove that the teaching of Christ, which the Disciples preached, was not based on human imagination and mind, and says about his personal experience: “For we have not followed cunningly devised fables, when we made known unto you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but were eyewitnesses of his majesty. For he received from God the Father honour and glory when there came such a voice to him from the excellent glory, “This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased”. And this voice which came from heaven we heard when we were with him in the holy mount” (2 Peter 1:16-18).

During His Transfiguration on Mount Tabor, the Lord revealed to His Disciples, firstly His power, which was shown to them [the disciples] by God the Father, through the glory of His Only-Begotten Son. And this glory is no other than the energy of the inaccessible Divine Light. “God is light” (1 John 1:5), the Evangelist John preaches. “I am the light of the world: he that followeth me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have

the light of life" (John 8:12), the Lord says. This truth is clearly phrased by the hymnographer who says: "O changeless Light of the Light of Thine unbegotten Begetter, today, O Word, have we now seen in Thy Light's manifestation the Father and Holy Spirit as Light on Tabor, guiding with light all creation" (Exapostilarion, Matins).

Secondly, [the Lord revealed to His Disciples] His presence. This means that the Transfiguration of Jesus Christ on the high mountain is a visible and tangible foretaste of the future glorious Kingdom of God, as the hymnographer also says precisely: "Clearly showing the exchange that Adam's mortal race shall make with Thy glory at Thy dread and second coming on the earth, Thou wast transfigured, O Saviour, upon mount Tabor" (Matins, Kathisma 1). And in more detail, our Saviour Christ, You were transfigured on Mount Tabor to prove and guarantee the expected glorious and dreadful Second Coming of Yours, and also the change that will happen then to the faithful and reverend Christians, which is their eternal glory.

Both the power and the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ in His Transfiguration, which was made known to us by the Holy Apostles the Evangelists, refer mainly and primarily to the strengthening of the Disciples' faith, that Jesus Christ "is my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased", as per the voice inside the cloud (Matt. 17:5). This very truth we hear from the hymnographer with the words: "On the mount Thou was transfigured, and Thy disciples, as much as they could bear, beheld Thy glory, O Christ our God; that when they should see Thee crucified, they would know Thy Passion to be willing, and would preach to the world that Thou, in truth, art the Effulgence of the Father" (Kontakion).

Christ's glory, which the Disciples saw, is also enjoyed by all the saints who have registered as citizens of the heavenly city, "the general assembly and church of the firstborn, which are written in heaven" (Hebrews 12:23).

This glory of Christ is also enjoyed by the pious and righteous Christians in the Kingdom of God. "Then shall the

righteous shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father" (Matt. 13:43), the Lord says.

The Holy Deacon Stephen beheld this glory of Christ, as he was "full of the Holy Spirit" (Acts 6:5). He looked up in heaven and saw the glory of God and Jesus sitting at the right of God (Acts 7:55). And Saint Paul preaches that all men who live in Christ reflect the Lord's glory: "But we all, with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord" (2 Cor. 3:18).

Interpreting these words, Saint Chrysostom says: "Just like the pure silver before the sun rays reflects the rays itself...in the same manner, the man's soul that is purified and has become brighter than silver receives a ray from the glory of the Holy Spirit and reflects that ray".

In other words, my dear Brethren, we are called to live a life in Christ, which means to actively participate in the holy sacramental life of the Church as faithful and genuine children of its Body, namely Christ. "Whoso offereth praise glorifieth me: and to him that ordereth his conversation aright will I shew the salvation of God" (Psalm 50:23) the psalmist proclaims. This means that the path to salvation lies only on sincere reverence, namely to our transfiguration in Christ.

Let us pray to our Saviour Christ who was Transfigured on this mount, that by the prayers of the Theotokos and Ever-Virgin Mary, He may "shine upon us sinners His light ever-unending" and lead us to our transfiguration. Amen."

After the Divine Liturgy, there was a reception by the renovator of the Monastery Archimandrite Hilarion and a meal at lunchtime.

For this feast there was also a festive Divine Liturgy in Gethsemane and Ramallah, under the hospitality of the Hegoumens, Archbishop Dorotheos of Avela, and Archimandrite Galaktion respectively.

From Secretariat-General

THE MINISTER OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS OF CYPRUS VISITS THE CHURCH OF THE HOLY SEPULCHRE

On Monday afternoon, 13/26 July 2021, the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Cyprus and his entourage visited the Church of the Holy Sepulchre while on a national mission in Israel.

The Minister was received by His Beatitude our Father and Patriarch of Jerusalem Theophilos and Hagiotaphite Fathers, His Eminence Geronda Sacristan Archbishop Isidoros of Hierapolis and the Fathers with him, His Eminence Geronda Secretary-General Archbishop Aristarchos of Constantina and Archdeacon Mark. The Minister was guided to the veneration of the All-holy Tomb and the Horrendous Golgotha and also venerated the Precious Wood at the office of Geronda Sacristan. His Beatitude offered the Minister icons of the Holy Sepulchre and the Theotokos of Jerusalem, along with the book "I am Jerusalem" by memorable Dentist John Tleel and wished him success in his mission.

From Secretariat-General

BLESSING OF MONASTIC CASSOCKS FOR NEW NOVICES

On Monday morning 6/19 July 2021, His Beatitude our Father and Patriarch of Jerusalem Theophilos blessed the monastic cassocks of two young novices, Christians Toumbelekis and James Dipaola, wishing them patience and obedience in the arena of their testing, so that they may join the Hagiotaphite Brotherhood.

From Secretariat-General

Patriarch Theophilos III: The attack on Al-Aqsa Compound and its worshipers is a flagrant violation of the rights to exercise freedom of worship

His Beatitude Patriarch Theophilos III, Patriarch of the Holy City of Jerusalem, affirmed that the Temple Mount – Al-Haram Al-Sharif and its' Al-Aqsa Compound – is the exclusive right and property of Muslims, and that attacking this sacred place or the right of Muslims to freely pray there is an attack on freedom of worship, as guaranteed by international laws, charters and human morals.

His Beatitude condemned the attempts of radical groups to provoke Muslims and Christians through continuous attacks and incitement on the Al-Haram Al-Sharif, considering that any visit to the Al-Haram Al-Sharif that is not approved by the Islamic Endowments Department is considered an intrusion that must stop.

His Beatitude praised the role of His Majesty King Abdullah II, the Hashemite custodian over the Islamic and Christian holy sites in the Holy Land, in defending the holy sites and His Majesty's constant endeavour to preserve them from the attacks and greed of those radical groups. His Beatitude also expressed his appreciation for the efforts made by Palestinian President Abu-Mazen, and the Supreme Presidential Committee for Church Affairs in Palestine to raise awareness about the practices of the radical groups and their attacks on Islamic and Christian sanctities.

THE AMERICAN CONGRESSMAN MR. FRENCH HILL VISITS THE PATRIARCHATE

On Thursday, June 25th / July 8th, 2021, the distinguished and honoured American Congressman French Hill, accompanied by his associates, visited the Patriarchate.

Mr French Hill was received by H.H.B. our Father and Patriarch of Jerusalem Theophilos and Hagiotaphite Fathers and representatives of the other Christian Churches in Jerusalem, Fr. Dobromir Jaształ on behalf of the Franciscans Brotherhood, Fr. Don Binder from the Anglican Church, and Fr. Antonios from the Coptic Church, addressing him as follows:

“Mr Chairman,

Representative Hill,

Respected Members of your Delegation,

Your Beatitudes,

Your Eminences,

Your Graces,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is our joy and privilege to welcome you to the Holy City of Jerusalem and to the Patriarchate of Jerusalem. You make your visit to us at a crucial time in the life of the peoples of this region, and we are encouraged that by your meeting with this gathering of the Heads of the Churches you understand the supreme importance of the role of religion in our life here, and we know of your concern for our life and well-being.

The United States has a particular and unique relationship with our region. Not only are there long-standing governmental, economic, and political relationships, as well as relationships with a host of non-governmental agencies; there are also religious ties. Jews, Christians and Muslims, both here and in the United States share historic family and spiritual connections. Indeed, many families have members living both here and in your country. And of course, from the United States, many thousands of pilgrims from all the Abrahamic traditions come here every year on pilgrimage to the Holy Places. By choosing to come to our Patriarchate, you number yourselves among those who are true pilgrims, whatever other purposes their trip may have. It is even said that President Lincoln had wanted to visit Jerusalem on pilgrimage, and we look forward to welcoming back pilgrims from the United States when international travel becomes easier.

As in every corner of the world, the last months have been

extremely challenging for us in the Holy Land. Because of the pandemic, our churches and Holy Sites have suffered significant restrictions and prolonged closure. We have been unable to share hospitality with pilgrims and tourists from around the world and our own communities have suffered significant hardship and deprivation. While COVID-19 has radically diminished our economic resources, we have continued, by God's grace, to try to meet the great spiritual, physical, educational, and financial needs of our local communities.

After this period of prolonged hardship, the conflicts of recent months in the Holy Land have proven extremely difficult and devastating. The violent outbreaks have served only to deepen the problems that the pandemic has caused. For many in our communities, a crisis has become a catastrophe.

The broad media coverage and the recent violence has brought global attention to our local suffering. Despite all this coverage, the true beginnings of this most recent conflict remain largely untold. We think that it is incumbent upon us to be clear that these tragic events are the direct result of years of the growth of extremist ideologies and attacks by a growing number of radical groups which have gone unchecked and unpunished. These radical groups are intent on driving out Christians, Muslims and even some Jewish groups from the Holy City of Jerusalem and other communities of our region.

The attacks range from the verbal abuse of and physical assaults against clergy, and worshippers as we go about our daily business to the frequent vandalism and desecration of church property and Holy Sites. Just a few weeks ago we saw a vicious assault of two Armenian clergy right outside their monastery in the Armenian Quarter and an intrusion into our School on Mount Sion by radicals. Sadly, and worryingly, these kinds of incidents are no longer exceptions; they are a regular part of our life. And it is intolerable.

As spiritual leaders, we have no desire to enter into politics or to make political statements. Our only concern is the safety and continuing flourishing of the Christian community in Jerusalem and the Holy Land. As Churches, we have stood strong and united in the face of ongoing violence and vandalism. But the situation has changed significantly. Were we simply dealing with harassment, we could manage this. But the stakes are now too high. For we are face-to-face with radical groups who seek and are working systematically for our eviction from the Holy City, whether in the threat to seize church properties and specifically at the Jaffa Gate – which is the entrance to the Christian Quarter and the route of pilgrimage to the Holy Sepulchre – or in Sheikh Jarrah – where attempts forcefully to displace local citizens in recent days erupted into the violence and even death which we have seen on our TV screens.

The Christian presence in the Holy City and in the Holy Land is vital for the well-being and integrity of this region. For centuries we have inhabited a multi-cultural, multi-ethnic, multi-religious landscape that has given this region its unique character as the land of the divine-human encounter. And while the three Abrahamic faiths all have Holy Sites here, it is the Christian Holy Sites that guarantee a truly universal welcome to all people of goodwill, without distinction. In other words, the Holy Sepulchre is the main destination of all pilgrims and visitors of Jerusalem. This unique character is now under serious threat as never before.

This is another aspect of our lives here that unites us in a common understanding, for both your great country and this region alike live in a multi-cultural, multi-ethnic, and multi-religious national life. One must understand that this region, however, because of its historical and religious significance, does not belong just to one group. It is connected with sacred history and with moral values which are of universal significance, and we are both well aware of the

importance to our mutual flourishing of protecting and defending this diversity of human, cultural, and spiritual experience.

The Churches and Christian Communities of the Holy Land remain firmly committed even in the face of unprecedented opposition and attack, to act as peacemakers and to carry out our spiritual mission. The mission of the Church has been fundamental in guaranteeing the sacredness of the rich cultural heritage of the Holy Land. Furthermore, we will continue to preserve the Holy Sites as places of worship and to keep them accessible to all who come here on pilgrimage.

However, we cannot remain silent to the reality that we are facing from the growing challenge to our very existence from radical groups. Nor can we do this on our own. We need our partners in the international community, and especially our friends and allies in the United States, and particularly in the government, who espouse respect for human dignity, to do this and through you, we call on the leaders of the Congress to a robust defence of the Christian presence in the Holy Land, against those who would work to undo our life here.

May God grant success to your mission. Through you, we seek to extend our partnerships in the United States. We look forward to working together, with the conviction that, with your support, we can continue to enable peoples of all faiths to thrive together in our beloved Holy Land.

Thank you.”

The address underlined the vital problems faced by the Churches of Jerusalem and the Holy Land, the place of worship of the three Abrahamic religions but also of the current political instability and quarrels.

Replying, Mr French Hill said that one of the basic principles of The USA is the freedom of religion, which is also used by the US for the peaceful coexistence of the religions in the

Holy Land and the support of the Christian identity.

On this visit, Mr French Hill offered His Beatitude an album with the title "Congregational Testimonies of Faith", while His Beatitude offered him in return an icon of the Theotokos and a silver painting of Jerusalem, along with memorable dentist John Tleel's book "I am Jerusalem", and blessing from Jerusalem to his companions.

From Secretariat-General

GRADUATION CEREMONY FOR THE SCHOOL OF RAMLA GRADUATES BY H.B. THE PATRIARCH OF JERUSALEM THEOPHILOS

On Wednesday evening, 18/30 June 2021, the graduation ceremony of the School of the Patriarchate graduates in Ramla was held at the Reception Hall of the town of Ramla, the ancient Arimathaea.

The ceremony was organized by the Hegoumen of Ramla Archimandrite Niphon, with the help of the School Principal Elham Mahoul and the teachers' association.

The ceremony started with the Apolytikion of Pentecost, and the blessing of H.H.B. our Father and Patriarch of Jerusalem Theophilos. Fifty-six graduates paraded on the stage with a short address of the Israeli Mayor of the town Mr Mihail Vidal, followed by that of the Community President, Mr Fayz

Mansour, who welcomed and thanked H.H.B. and His Entourage, and the Mayor and the representative of the Ministry of Education of Israel, the School Teachers and the students, the School Principal Mrs Elham Mahoul and the graduates of the 26th cohort since the School's foundation.

The students had the opportunity to talk about their twelve-year experiences in the School and expressed their gratitude to their teachers and parents.

The School Principal referred to the 95% success rate of the graduates and the Patriarchate's support to the School and thanked the teachers for their cooperation and the students for their diligence and good conduct according to the psalm: "They that sow in tears shall reap in joy" (Psalm 126:5). She also mentioned education righteousness and conciliation as principles for one's life.

Prizes were given to the distinguished teachers, parents and graduates and to Fr Jiries Mansour, responsible for the Christian Schools from the Ministry of Education, who also spoke.

The ceremony included Arabic patriotic songs and dances by the graduates and school activities and previous years' excursions were displayed on the big screen.

The certificates were given after His Beatitude's address in Arabic, through Fr Issa Mousleh, who stressed the importance of keeping the Rum Orthodox identity of the students.

Finally, His Beatitude and the School Principal and the teachers handed each of the graduates their leaving certificate, wishing them academic and professional success and gave a 15.000 Nis grant to the School.

From Secretariat-General

HONORARY RECEPTION FOR THE SCHOOL OF ZION GRADUATES BY THE CONSUL GENERAL OF GREECE IN JERUSALEM

On Thursday afternoon on the Feast of the Ascension, 28 May/ 10 June 2021, the Consul General of Greece in Jerusalem Mr Evangelos Vlioras, continuing his ongoing interest in the Patriarchal School of Holy Zion, hosted a reception in honour of the Zion School Graduates at the Greek General Consulate which is also his house estate.

The reception was attended by the full group of students, the Managing Director of the School, Archimandrite Mattheos, the School Teachers, the Consul General's wife and son, the Consul Mrs Christina Zaharioudaki and the Consulate staff members. Invited were also, H.H.B. our Father and Patriarch of Jerusalem Theophilos III, the Chairman of the School Board, His Eminence Archbishop Isidoros of Hierapolis, His Eminence Archbishop Aristarchos of Constantina and Geronda Secretary-General and Archdeacon Mark.

The students chanted the Apolytikion of the feast of the Ascension and the Consul General delivered the following address:

“Your Beatitude,

Your Eminences,

Reverend Fathers,

Dear Colleagues,

Our dearest children,

It is a special honour and pleasure for my colleagues and for me personally, to welcome you today to the Consulate General of Greece in Jerusalem, on the occasion of the end of this school year at the Patriarchal School of Zion.

I think it is a common finding that this school year included many and varied challenges, both in health and in education. In these circumstances, the Patriarchal School of Holy Zion, with its students, teachers and staff, managed to continue its operation smoothly, contributing to the work of our Patriarchate. The conscientiousness, the responsibility and the devotion of the worthy Managing School Directory and the staff of the School as well as the love for learning, the consistency and the discipline of its students contributed decisively to this success.

Allow me, on behalf of the Authority we serve, to express to the administration, the teaching staff, and the staff of the Patriarchal School of Holy Zion our appreciation and respect for the important and national work that is being done despite the difficulties.

Special thanks should be addressed to You, Your Beatitude, for the paternal love with which you surround the School's work. Your devotion to the multidimensional work carried out at the School for the preservation and promotion of Greek and Orthodox education in the Holy Land, and Your tireless efforts to continue this work are recognized by all, both here in the Holy Land and in our Homeland. Thanks should also be extended to the Chairman of the School Board, His Eminence Archbishop of Hierapolis.

I would also like to assure you, the members of the Hagiotaphite Brotherhood and the staff and students of the School that our support and assistance to the Patriarchal School of Zion, the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate of Jerusalem

and the Hagiotaphite Brotherhood is and remains complete, and meaningful.

At this point, I take this opportunity to thank everyone for the unparalleled hospitality we have received since our arrival in Jerusalem.

Dear children,

We had the pleasure to meet you during the year in different opportunities and in different places. We have seen you serve with deep faith, reverence and obedience the liturgical work of the Church, to serve willingly where there was a need, to study consistently, with some breaks it is the truth, to achieve your learning goals, to defend vigorously and with determination the rights of the Holy Institution and especially, in times that imposed social isolation and distance, to maintain unity among yourself and to coexist, in the bond of the love of Christ.

We rejoiced in your friendship, we appreciated your kindness, and several Sundays, we shared with you the joy of the Resurrection.

We wish you heartfelt health and every blessing from God.

Evangelos Vlioras

Consul General of Greece “.

His Beatitude thanked the Consul General for his interest in the School underlining His petition to the Students, to remain in Israel, if they wish, where they can study foreign languages funded by the Patriarchate.

From Secretariat-General

MEETING OF SPECIAL ENVOY AND CONSULS OF THE EUROPEAN UNION WITH LEADERS OF LOCAL CHURCHES AT THE PATRIARCHATE

On Thursday 14/27 May 2021, a meeting was held at the Patriarchate under the care of H.H.B. our Father and Patriarch of Jerusalem Theophilos with Mr Sven Koopmans, Special Envoy of the European Union for the Middle East matters, and representatives of the local Churches of Jerusalem; the Custos of the Holy Land, as well as the representatives of the Lutheran, Anglican and Ethiopian Churches respectively.

In this meeting, Mr Sven Koopmans expressed the intention on behalf of the European Union to support the Churches in their difficulties and requested to be informed on the existing problems, especially after the recent hostilities in Jerusalem, Gaza and other regions.

Thanking Mr Sven, His Beatitude referred to the cooperation of the Churches with the European Union, and especially to the visit of the Heads of Primeval Churches to the European Union, when the latter offered funds with which the Patriarchate constructed a School in Birzeit, adding the Status Quo issue was also discussed. Moreover, His Beatitude raised the issue of the illegal rental of the Jaffa Gate Hotels by radical groups, as this Gate is the main and of vital importance entrance for the centuries-long Christians to the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, and also mentioned the problems created by the same groups in the Hill of Zion. Advocates to His Beatitude's words were the representatives of the Franciscans,

Fr. Patton, of the Anglicans, His Eminence Bishop Housam Naoum and of the Lutherans, His Eminence Bishop Azar.

Next to this meeting was that of the Head of the Delegation of the European Union, and the Head of the Delegations of the other member-countries of the European Union which are interested in the Status Quo of Jerusalem and at the presence of the aforementioned representatives of Churches, His Beatitude welcomed them with the following address:

“Respected Delegates of the European Union in Jerusalem and Ramallah,

Your Beatitudes,

Your Eminences,

Your Graces,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is our joy and privilege to welcome you to the Holy City of Jerusalem and to the Patriarchate of Jerusalem. On behalf of our fellow Heads of the Churches, please allow us to express our appreciation for your visit. You come to us at a crucial moment in the life of the peoples of this region, and we are heartened by your presence and commitment to our life and well-being.

The Christian community in the Holy Land has enjoyed deep historical connections and rich relationships with the peoples of Europe for almost two thousand years. In this place where the Church was revealed in all its fulness, we are mindful of Europe’s role in the development of Christian faith and culture. The centuries-long partnerships between leaders of Europe and the Holy Land have enabled the mission of the Gospel to reach every country and continent.

Equally for centuries pilgrims have come here to be refreshed at the Holy Places, which are oases of spiritual renewal for

all who visit them. When restrictions have been lifted and travel is possible, we look forward to welcoming many thousands of European visitors to Jerusalem once more.

As in every corner of the world, the last months have been extremely challenging for us in the Holy Land. Because of the pandemic, our Churches and Holy sites have suffered significant restrictions and prolonged closure. We have been unable to share hospitality with pilgrims and tourists from around the world and our own communities have suffered significant hardship and deprivation. While covid-19 has radically diminished our economic resources, we have continued to try to meet the great spiritual, physical, educational, and financial needs of our local communities by God's grace.

After this period of prolonged hardship, the conflicts of recent weeks in the Holy Land have proven extremely difficult and devastating. The violent outbreaks have served only to deepen the problems that the pandemic has caused. For many in our communities, a crisis has become a catastrophe.

Over the last weeks, the never-ending news cycle has brought global attention to our local suffering. Despite all this coverage, the true beginning of this most recent conflict remains largely untold. These tragic events are the direct result of years of the growth of extremist ideologies and attacks by a growing number of radical groups which have gone unchecked and unpunished. These radical groups are intent on driving out Christians, Muslims, and even some of the Jewish groups, for the Holy City of Jerusalem, and other communities of our region.

The attacks range from verbal abuse to physical attacks against clergy and worshippers as we go about our daily business to the frequent desecration of Church property and Holy Sites. Just in the last few days, we have seen the vicious assault of two Armenian clergy right outside their monastery in the Armenian Quarter and an intrusion into our

School on Mount Sion by radicals. Sadly, and worryingly, these kinds of incidents are no longer exceptions; they are a regular part of our life. And it is intolerable.

As spiritual leaders, we have no desire to enter into politics, nor make political statements. Our only concern is the safety and continuing flourishing of the Christian community in Jerusalem and the Holy Land. As Churches, we have stood strong and united in the face of ongoing violence and vandalism. But the situation has changed significantly. We are simply dealing with harassment and could manage this. But the stakes are now too high. For we are face to face with radical groups which seek and are working systematically for our eviction from the Holy City, whether by the threat to seize Church properties, and especially Jaffa Gate – which is the entrance to the Christian Quarter and the pilgrimage route to the Holy Sepulchre – or in Sheikh Jarrah – where attempts to forcefully displace local citizens in recent days erupted into the violence that we have seen on our TV screens.

The Christian presence in the Holy City and in the Holy Land is vital for the well-being and integrity of this region. For centuries we have inhabited a multi-cultural, multi-ethnic, multi-religious landscape that has given this region its unique character as the land of the divine-human encounter. And while all the three Abrahamic faiths have Holy Sites here, it is the Christian Holy Sites that guarantee a truly universal welcome to all people of goodwill without distinction. This unique character is now under serious threat as never before.

The Churches and Christian communities of the Holy Land remain firmly committed, even in the face of unprecedented opposition and attack, to act as peacemakers and to carry out our spiritual mission. Furthermore, we will continue to welcome to the Holy Sites all who come here on pilgrimage.

However, we cannot resist the growing challenge to our very

existence from radical groups alone. We need our partners in the international community, and especially our traditional friends and allies in Europe to do this, and through you, we call on the leaders of Europe to a robust defence of the Christian presence in the Holy Land against those who would work to undo our life here.

May God grant success to your mission. Through you, we seek to extend and renew these European partnerships. We look forward to working together, with the conviction that, with your support, we can continue to enable peoples of all faiths to thrive together in our beloved Holy Land.

Thank you.”

To this, the Diplomatic Representatives replied that the Churches in the Holy Land are the guarantee for maintaining the Status Quo of Jerusalem as the Holy City of the three monotheistic religions, as well as for the peaceful coexistence of the faithful people of these Churches, with respect for their religious beliefs, according to the Status Quo, and expressed their willingness to provide humanitarian assistance to those recently affected in Gaza.

The Representative of the European Union Mr Kühn von Burgsdorff replied in particular, saying that he has been aware of the religious background of the hostilities in the Middle East since his youth, as well as of the international role that the religious leaders are capable of displaying towards their mitigation and resolution.

On this occasion, His Beatitude offered each of the attendees in the meeting His blessings from Jerusalem and the memorable John Tleel’s book “I am Jerusalem”.

From Secretariat-General

EU'S SPECIAL REPRESENTATIVE FOR THE MIDDLE EAST PEACE PROCESS AND EU'S TOP REPRESENTATIVE TO PALESTINE VISIT THE PATRIARCHATE

On Thursday, May 27, His Beatitude Patriarch Theophilos III received Mr. Sven Koopmans, EU's Special Representative for the Middle East Peace Process, and Mr. Sven Kühn von Burgsdorff, European Union's top representative to Palestine, accompanied by a delegation of European diplomats and ambassadors, at the headquarters of the Jerusalem Patriarchate.

Alongside Heads of Churches in Jerusalem, His Beatitude welcomed the representatives and ambassadors on behalf of all the Churches of the Holy Land, expressing his appreciation for the visit, which comes at a sensitive time the region is going through. His Beatitude also affirmed the good relations between the people of the Holy Land and Europe, and the important role the European pilgrims to the Holy Lands, especially Jerusalem, play. Eager for their return after the travel restrictions of the COVID-19 pandemic are lifted. Highlighting the great economic hardships this pandemic have and continue to cause to various parts of the Holy Land. The Patriarch of Jerusalem and the Heads of Churches indicated that the recent events in the Holy Land, chiefly the war on the Gaza Strip, complicated the scene furthermore and deepened the wounds that were already caused by the pandemic.

Church leaders warned of the growing power and influence of Israeli radicals, who target Christians and Muslims in the Holy Land. Noting that this radicalism has reached the point of carrying out repeated verbal and physical assaults against Christian clergy without being prosecuted or legally punished. The last of which was the physical assault on two Armenian clergies outside the walls of their monastery, which lies at the heart of the Armenian Quarter, in addition to the assault on the Greek Orthodox theological seminary school on Mount Zion, and the arson attack on the Church of All Nations -the Gethsemane, explaining that these attacks, which occur too often, have unfortunately become part of daily life.

On his part, Patriarch Theophilos affirmed that the Christian clergy are working for justice, peace and security in the Holy Land, but their greatest concern is to protect their local Christian communities, especially in Jerusalem, "as Churches, we have stood strong and united in the face of ongoing violence and vandalism. But the situation has changed significantly. Were we simply dealing with harassment, we could manage that. But the stakes are now too high. For we are face-to-face with radical groups who seek, and are working systematically for, our eviction from the Holy City, whether in the threat to seize church properties, and specifically at the Jaffa Gate – which is the entrance to the Christian quarter and the route of pilgrimage to the Holy Sepulcher – or in Sheikh Jarrah – where attempts forcefully to displace local citizens in recent days erupted into the violence which we have seen on our TV screens."

During a Q&A session, Church leaders emphasized that saving the authentic Christian presence in the region preserves its diverse nature, true identity and unique features, and that all of this is now facing a great danger due to the Israeli radical groups, adding that the Churches and Christians have historical rights in the Holy Land, and that they are committed to peace despite what they are exposed to. Their

Paternities and Graces also stressed that the doors of Jerusalemites will remain open to pilgrims from all over the world, pointing out the importance of the Hashemite custodianship of the Christian and Islamic holy sites in the Holy Land, and the distinguished leadership role that His Majesty King Abdullah II plays in preserving this guardianship and protecting the sanctities in the Holy City.

Lastly, Heads of the Churches demanded the support of the international community, in efforts to confront the radical Israeli groups, in order to defend the authentic Christian presence in Jerusalem and the rest of the Holy Land, within the framework of true cooperation and partnership that respects international resolutions and legitimacy, and preserves the Status Quo agreement in the holy places.







THE GREEK MINISTER OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS VISITS THE PATRIARCHATE

On Tuesday morning, 5/18 May 2021, the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Greece, Mr Nikolaos Dendias visited the Patriarchate, accompanied by the Ambassador of Greece in Israel Mr Panayiotis Sarris and the Consul General of Greece in Jerusalem Mr Evangelos Vlioras.

His Excellency the Minister Mr Dendias was warmly received by H.H.B. our Father and Patriarch of Jerusalem Theophilos and Hagiotaphite Fathers, who thanked him for the honour of the visit.

The Minister of Foreign Affairs expressed the vivid interest of Homeland Greece, the Greek Government and of himself personally for the Patriarchate, saying that “the Patriarchate

is of the highest priority". The Minister was informed by His Beatitude on the pastoral, charitable, conciliating and peacekeeping mission of the Patriarchate, especially amidst the one-year-long covid-19 pandemic and the intensity of the war conflict between Israel and Gaza.

His Beatitude wished the Minister the best outcome of the purpose of his visit and the help of the Risen Christ for the fulfilment of his mission.

From Secretariat-General