

GRADUATION CEREMONY AT ST DEMETRIUS SCHOOL

At 5:00 pm of Saturday the 19th of May/1st of June 2013, the graduation ceremony of 20 graduating students took place at the hall of ceremonies of "St Demetrius" Patriarchal School, in the presence of His Beatitude Theophilos III, Our Father and Patriarch of Jerusalem; the Consul General of Greece in Jerusalem, Mr Soterios Athanasiou and his honorable wife, a Greek Language teacher at the School; the representative of the Republic of Cyprus to the Palestinian Autonomy, Mr Antonios Samoutis, the representative of the Palestinian Autonomy Minister of Education, Mr Samir Gabriye, the Chairman of the School Board of Patriarchal Schools in Israel; the Most Reverend Esychios, Metropolitan of Kapitolia, the Grand Chancellor Aristarchos, Archbishop of Constantina; the Patriarchal Commissioner in Irbet, Jordan, His Eminence Philoumenos, Archbishop of Pella; Archdeacon f. Athanasios, Hierodeacon f. Eulogios, the School's Principal Mr Samir Zananiri, teachers at the School and the graduates' parents and other relatives.

The building of the School of "St Demetrius" which was essentially the latest expansion of the Patriarchate towards the Jaffa Gate, served as the Patriarchate School from which most of the either departed or living guardians of the Holy Sepulcher had graduated until the year 1970, when the School was transferred to the building now standing out on top of the Hill of St Sion.

The premises of the Hieratic School were offered from 1985 onwards by Diodoros, the Late Patriarch of Jerusalem, for the accommodation of a Preschool, an Elementary School, a High School and a Lyceum, maintained by the Patriarchate under the name "St Demetrius", owing to the existence within the school

complex, of an ancient Chapel in honor of the glorified great martyr St Demetrius the Myrrh-Bearer.

The well-organized ceremony began with the prayer "Christ is risen" in Greek and "Al Massih Kam" in Arab, followed by recitations of the National Palestinian Anthem and the Greek National Anthem.

The School Principal, Mr Samir Zananiri went on to extend his gratitude to His Beatitude for the moral and material help offered by the Patriarchate to the School, to Mr Hanna Amire, Chairman of the Committee on Christian Affairs, for the financial aid provided by the Palestinian Autonomy towards repairs and renovations at the School, and also praised the graduates for their performance and ethics, wishing that they successfully pursue their studies and perform well in society.

Two graduates offered flowers to his Beatitude and the Chairman of the School Board for their support to the School.

Students at the Preschool, Elementary School, High School and Lyceum, boys and girls alike, performed Palestinian dances.

Three representatives of the graduating students spoke on behalf of their peers, one in Arab, one in English and one in Greek, pointing out how difficult it is to be diligent and perform well, and how such difficulties may be overcome with the help of parents and teachers, to whom they extended their deep gratitude.

A touching moment at the ceremony was the presentation of the Principal with an honorary plaque and the "change of guard" between this year's (2012-2013) graduating students and seniors of the next academic year.

The ceremony was concluded with an address of His Beatitude in Arab, as follows at:<https://en.jerusalem-patriarchate.info/ar/2013/06/01/2429/> stressing the importance attributed by the Patriarchate to the

education of youth at schools maintained on its own expenses and the donations of charity foundations where the coexistence of Christian and Muslim students is favored and promoted and greatly contributes to the peaceful symbiosis and cooperation between such fellow students.

The ceremony closed with His Beatitude and the Professors conferring the titles to the graduating students, followed by the Palestinian National Anthem and His Beatitude's prayer for longevity.

From the Secretariat-General

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ADDRESS OF GREETING TO THE HONORABLE BARACK OBAMA, PRESIDENT OF THE U.S.A.

Bethlehem, 22 March 2013.

Mr. President,

The city of Bethlehem, the City of Peace, welcomes you today in this holy Church of the Nativity – the place where heaven and earth met, and where peace and reconciliation between God and humanity, as well as among human beings, took on our human flesh in Jesus Christ.

Here therefore we remember the words that announced to the shepherds:

“ Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace,

goodwill among all people!" (Luke 2:14).

To this City of Peace, where for generations Christians and Muslims have lived together as one people, we welcome you as a leader and as a messenger of peace and reconciliation. The people of our region long for peace and have invested their hope and trust in those who have the power to lead the world into a new age of peace for all. For *"blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of Cod."* (Mt. 5:9)

And so we look to you, Mr. President, as the leader of a great and noble nation that promotes the ideals of peace, reconciliation, justice and democratic principles among all peoples. It was here that the ideal of peace and reconciliation became a human being; and so it is fitting that from here you may gain strength and wisdom for the task ahead.

As the Patriarch of Jerusalem, on behalf of the Palestinian community, made up of Christians and Muslims, we extend to you the assurance of our best wishes and encouragement. And we pray that the King of Peace and Justice, who was born in this very holy place, may grant to you and to the Government of the United States, perseverance and vision in your work of governing.

We also wish to acknowledge the efforts and the commitment of His Excellency, President Mahmoud Abbas, in the cause of peace and co-existence in our region, and the resolution of an independent future for the Palestinian people.

In remembrance of your visit, Mr. President, would you please accept these symbolic gifts with the blessings of the Holy Land. And we look forward to seeing you when we come to Washington.

Thank you.

His Beatitude

THEOPHILOS III

Patriarch of Jerusalem

PROGRAMME OF THE OFFICIAL VISIT OF PATRIARCH OF MOSKOW KYRILL TO THE HOLY LAND.

Friday, October 27 / November 9

14:00

Arrival at Ben Gurion airport (Terminal 1), Tel Aviv, of His Beatitude Kirill, Patriarch of Moscow and all Russia. His Beatitude is met by a delegation of the Patriarchate of Jerusalem consisting of:

His Eminence Isychios, Metropolitan of Capitoliass; His Eminence Theophylaktos, Archbishop of the Jordan; Rev. Archimandrite Stephanos; and Rev. Archimandrite Galaktion. His Excellency Mr. Sergey Yakovlev, Ambassador of the Russian Federation to State of Israel; His Excellency Mr. Alexander Rudakov, Representative of the Russian Federation to the Palestinian Authority; and Rev. Archimandrite Isidor, the Head of the Russian Ecclesiastical Mission in Jerusalem are also present.

14:30-15:30

Transfer to Jerusalem by car to the King David Hotel.

17:00

Official entrance to the Old City at Jaffa Gate met by a

delegation of the Patriarchate of Jerusalem, representatives of the Christian Communities in Jerusalem, local Authorities and the people. Procession to the gate of the Patriarchate of Jerusalem.

17:15

Procession of H.B. Theophilos III, Patriarch of Jerusalem, and H.B. Kirill, Patriarch of Moscow, to the Holy Sepulchre Church.

17:30

Arrival at the Holy Sepulchre Church. Veneration of the Stone of Unction and the Holy Tomb, Gospel reading, Doxology in the Catholicon, exchange of greetings.

18:30

Return to the Patriarchate. Reception. Greetings. Decoration of H.B.Patriarch Kyrill. Transfer to the King David Hotel. Dinner.

Saturday, October 28 / November 10

Breakfast at the King David Hotel.

10:20

Transfer to Gethsemane.

10:40

Visit to the Tomb of the Mother of God. Prayer and Gospel reading.

Visit to the Garden of Gethsemane.

11:30

Transfer to Bethlehem.

12:00

Visit to the Grotto and the Basilica of the Nativity of Christ of His Beatitude Kirill, Patriarch of Moscow, who will be officially met by the Patriarchal Representative, His Eminence Theophylaktos, Archbishop of Jordan, the priests, and His Excellency Mr. Alexander Rudakov, Representative of the Russian Federation to the Palestinian Authority, local Authorities and the Flock. Greetings. Meeting with the local Press in the courtyard of the Basilica.

13:00

Meeting of His Beatitude Kirill, Patriarch of Moscow, and His Beatitude Theophilos, Patriarch of Jerusalem, with His Excellency Mr. Mahmoud Abbas, President of the Palestinian Authority, at the presidential residence in Bethlehem.

13:30

Official luncheon in honor of His Beatitude Kirill, Patriarch of Moscow and His Beatitude Theophilos, Patriarch of Jerusalem, given by His Excellency Mr. Mahmoud Abbas, President of the Palestinian Authority.

15:00

Transfer to the King David Hotel.

18:00

Vespers and Matins at the Holy Trinity Cathedral of the Russian Ecclesiastical Mission in Jerusalem. Presentation of awards. Dinner.

23:25

Transfer by car to Jaffa Gate.

23:35

Procession to the Patriarchate.

23:50

Procession from the Patriarchate of Jerusalem to the Holy Sepulchre Church.

Sunday, October 29 / November 11

00:00

Arrival of His Beatitude Kirill, Patriarch of Moscow, and His Beatitude Theophilos, Patriarch of Jerusalem, at the Holy Sepulchre Church. Matins in the Catholicon.

00:30

Patriarchal concelebration of the Divine Liturgy in the Holy and Life- Giving Tomb. Exchange of greetings in front of the Holy Edicule. Office of the Holy Sepulchre Church.

03:30

Departure of His Beatitude Kirill, Patriarch of Moscow, from the Holy Sepulchre Church to Jaffa Gate. Transfer to King David Hotel.

12:00

Breakfast.

Meeting of His Beatitude Kirill, Patriarch of Moscow, with Mr. Jona Metzger and Mr. Shlomo Amar, Chief Rabbis of Israel, at the Chief Rabbinate.

13:30

Presentation of His Beatitude Patriarch Kirill's book Freedom and Responsibility in Hebrew and of the jubilee almanac Russian Palestine: Peoples and Destinies at the King David Hotel.

14:00

Official luncheon in honor of His Beatitude Kirill, Patriarch of Moscow, given by His Beatitude Theophilos, Patriarch of Jerusalem, at the King David Hotel.

16:00

Meeting of His Beatitude Kirill, Patriarch of Moscow, and His Beatitude Theophilos, Patriarch of Jerusalem, with His Excellency Mr. Shimon Peres, President of the State of Israel at the President's residence.

17:15

Meeting His Beatitude Kirill, Patriarch of Moscow, with His Honor Mr. Nir Barkat, Mayor of Jerusalem.

18:10

Transfer by car to Lions' Gate. Procession along the Way of the Cross.

19:00

Veneration of the Calvary, the Stone of Unction and the Holy Tomb with hymns and Gospel reading.

19:30 – 21:30

Reception in honor of His Beatitude Kirill, Patriarch of Moscow, given by His Beatitude Theophilos, Patriarch of Jerusalem, at the Patriarchate of Jerusalem. Transfer to the King David Hotel.

Monday, October 30 / November 12

08:40

Transfer to the Gorny Convent.

09:00

Consecration of the Church of All Saints of Russia. Divine Liturgy. Presentation of awards to the benefactors.

12:15

Luncheon in the Refectory of the Gorny Convent.

14:00

Visit to Yad Vashem Memorial.

14:50

Visit to St Mary Magdalene Convent in Gethsemane.

15:30

Visit to the Convent of the Ascension on the Mount of Olives. Prayer for the departed at the tomb of Archimandrite Antonin Kapustin. Tea.

16:30

Transfer to King David Hotel. Dinner.

Tuesday, October 31 / November 13

Private breakfast.

08:00-10:00

Transfer to Mount Tabor.

10:00

Visit to the Monastery of the Transfiguration on Mount Tabor. Prayer and Gospel reading.

10:45

Transfer to Nazareth.

11:30

Arrival at the Church of the Annunciation. His Beatitude Kirill, Patriarch of Moscow, is met by His Eminence Kyriakos, Metropolitan of Nazareth; His Honor Mr. Ramzi Jaraise, Mayor of Nazareth; Mr. Popov, Consul of Russia in Haifa; and Mr. Amin Sifia, Consul of Russia in Ashdod. Prayer and Gospel reading.

12:15

Meeting of His Beatitude Kirill, Patriarch of Moscow, with His Eminence Kyriakos, Metropolitan of Nazareth, and with His Honor Mr. Ramzi Jaraise, Mayor of Nazareth at the Hall of the Nazareth Metropolia. Official luncheon in honor His Beatitude Kirill, Patriarch of Moscow, given by His Eminence Kyriakos, Metropolitan of Nazareth at the Nazareth Metropolia.

14:00

Transfer to Tiberias.

14:30

Visit to the Monastery of the Twelve Apostles of the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate in Tiberias.

14:45

Visit to the Russian Pilgrim's House in Tiberias.

15:10

Visit to the St Mary Magdalene dependency of the Russian Ecclesiastical Mission. Prayer and Gospel reading.

17:00

Transfer to the Kingdom of Jordan via Allenby Bridge.

20:00

(Jordanian summer time) Arrival at the Pilgrims' Centre on the Jordan River. His Beatitude Patriarch Kirill is met by His Beatitude Patriarch Theophilos, His Highness Prince Ghazi ben Muhammad and His Excellency Mr. Alexander Kalugin, Ambassador of the Russian Federation to the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan. Dinner given by the Russian President's General Affairs Department at the Refectory of the Pilgrims' Centre.

Wednesday, November 1/14

Breakfast.

10:20

Vesting in the house chapel. Procession to Jordan River. Great Blessing of the Waters.

11:05

Visit to the Greek Monastery of St John the Baptist on the bank of the Jordan River. His Beatitude Kirill, Patriarch of Moscow, is met by His Eminence Benedict, Metropolitan of Philadelphia and Patriarchal Representative in Amman.

11:55

Transfer by car to Amman.

13:00

Meeting of His Beatitude Patriarch Kirill and His Beatitude Patriarch Theophilos with His Majesty Abdallah Ibn Husein II, King of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan.

13:30

Official luncheon in honor of His Beatitude Patriarch Kirill and His Beatitude Patriarch Theophilos given by His Majesty King Abdallah II.

15:00-15:30

Transfer to Queen Alia International Airport.

15:45

Departure of His Beatitude Patriarch Kirill for Moscow.

End of the visit of His Beatitude Kirill Patriarch of Moscow.

Chief Secretary's Office

**H. B. THEOPHILOS III PATRIARCH
OF JERUSALEM VISITED AL-**

ZAITARI REFUGEE CAMP IN JORDAN

On Monday, August 6, 2012, His Beatitude Patriarch Theophilos III, Greek Orthodox Patriarch of the Holy City of Jerusalem and all of Palestine and Jordan, and President of the Middle East Council of Churches for the Orthodox Family, expressed his concern for and acted out of what he called a “moral duty” by making a pastoral visit to the Syrian families who have fled the deteriorating situation in Syria, And who have sought sanctuary in the Al-Zaitari Camp located just a few kilometers from the city of Mafraq in northern Jordan.

His Beatitude’s visit comes out of a genuine sense of love and concern for the people who are caught up in this humanitarian crisis. The local church is committed to the Christian mission found in Mathew 25:35,36 – “for I was a stranger and you received me, sick and you visited me, hungry and you gave me food, naked and you clothed me.”

“It is a moral duty for the church to support and be present those who suffer , who at this time need everyone’s love and assurance”, His Beatitude stated.

The Church is in prayer for peace, and a desire that all might soon return to their homes and country, being especially mindful of the children, who need to be at home and in secure dwellings.

His Beatitude expressed his deep gratitude for Jordan and especially for His Majesty King Abdullah II and the Hashemite Kingdom , for welcoming the refugees and hosting them in the best possible way. Jordan has, throughout its history, accepted within its borders many people in need of help , hosting them as guests until the day when they can once again return home safely.

His Beatitude was briefed by the Jordan Hashemite Charity Organization and the UNHCR representatives as to the current situation and conditions within the camp.

The Orthodox Church has pledged to provide assistance .

“We call upon all people of goodwill to join us in this humanitarian effort”.

From the Office Of His Beatitude Patriarch Theophilos II The Middle East Council of Churches President for the orthodox Family Amman –Jordan

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SYNAXIS OF THE PRIMATES OF THE ORTHODOX CHURCHES OF THE MIDDLE EAST

On the invitation of His Beatitude Archbishop of Cyprus Chrysostomos II, and in the framework of the pastoral care of the Senior Patriarchates of the Middle East and the Apostolic Church of Cyprus, arrived today, 27th March 2012, Their Beatitudes, Patriarch Theodoros II, of Alexandria and All Africa, Patriarch Ignatius IV, of Antioch and all the East, and Patriarch Theophilos III, of Jerusalem and the Holy Land, to participate in the Synaxis of the primates of the Orthodox Churches, in order to discuss the situation of the Christians in the region of the Middle East and to find ways of solidarity, strengthening and support of the Christians to maintain their presence in their ancestral homes.

This Synaxis of the Primates aims at further strengthening the

bonds amongst the Orthodox Churches in the region of the Middle East and to improve the cooperation amongst them, as well as the relationships amongst all the fellow Christians and to develop the harmonious and friendly relations between the members of the three Monotheistic religions. In addition, through the Orthodox Synaxis, the representatives of the Orthodox Churches of the Middle East could have meetings and discussions, searching for answers to many important issues, which are related to the Christian presence in the Middle East.

The Primate of the Churches discussed as well the challenges of the region in view of the political and socio-economic changes that are currently taking place in the Middle East at large, and stressed on the need to resolve all conflicting matters through peaceful means and constructive dialogue.

The Patriarchs and the Archbishop of Cyprus underlined as well that due to the current situation in Syria, this Synaxis has a special importance and supported the immediate need for peace, security and stability. They proposed to form a delegation of Primate to visit different decision making centres in order to voice their concern for peace and reconciliation and to create awareness of the situation of the Christians in the Middle East.

They highlighted as well that Syria is a land in which Christians exist since the dawn of Christianity and coexist with mosques in a unique symbolism of symbiosis, fraternity and mutual respect that bring people together. The Primate of Churches confirmed their commitment to support all the efforts and necessary initiatives in order to restore peace and achieve the aspirations of all citizens of Syria.

In addition, the Primate discussed as well ways of common action in a series of programs for the youth of the four Churches, which will be realized soon. They reconfirmed the commitment of the Orthodox Churches towards the Middle East

Council of Churches.

The Synaxis made a special reference to the memory of the late Pope Shenouda III, of the Coptic Church who died on 17th March 2012. The Primate of the four Churches expressed their deep condolences to the Coptic Church and wished them to elect a worthy successor.

The Synaxis was concluded with the Blessing of His Beatitude the Archbishop of Cyprus, who wished the Church Primate and their congregations a blessed fasting in order to receive with pure hearts the victorious Christ, who triumphed over death. H.B Archbishop of Cyprus also wished peace for all the people of the region and the world.

Holy Archbishopric of Cyprus,

March 27, 2012.

INTERFAITH CLIMATE AND ENERGY CONFERENCE PROJECT.

The Interfaith Center for Sustainable Development (ICSD,) is organizing an Interfaith Climate and Energy Conference in March, 2012 involving world and Israel-based religious leaders speaking out on the ethical imperative and religious basis for action on climate change and use of renewable energy. The goal of the Conference is to generate tractable change regarding environmental sustainability within faith-based communities in Israel and worldwide. The two main levers for change are religious leaders and emerging religious teachers.

The Conference will be held at the Konrad Adenauer Event Center in Mishkenot Sha'ananim, Jerusalem. ICSD has extended invitations to Greek Orthodox Patriarch of Jerusalem Theophilos III, Chief Rabbi Yona Metzger, and Kadi Iyad Zahalka (chief judge of the Haifa Sharia Court). The first two sit on the Council of Religious Institutions of the Holy Land, which represents the high religious authorities of the Holy Land. Each religious figure will convey the perspective of their faith tradition and call for environmental action and co-existence within their respective faith communities.

In addition to these leaders, the conference aims to include video addresses by world religious leaders. ICSD is currently in the process of securing participation of Pope Benedict the 16th, the Archbishop of Canterbury, the Dalai Lama, the Patriarch of the Greek Orthodox Church, and a Hindu and Muslim religious leader.

In addition to the main panel event, the following break-out workshops will be held:

- Interfaith seminary students workshop on climate change and energy
- Interfaith women's workshop on climate change and energy
- Public forum on climate change and religious perspectives
- Public forum on renewable energy and religious perspectives

The Conference will also see the launch of the Interfaith Seminary Students Sustainability Project, bringing together

Israeli and Palestinian, Muslim, Christian, and Jewish seminary students and clergy from Jerusalem and nearby areas to undergo a transformative program aimed at directly impacting their respective communities promoting environmental activism based on religious teachings. Cultivating a cohort of emerging religious leaders with a shared understanding of the human and environmental challenges facing the region will help bring a voice of moderation and healing to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict while tapping into religious communities to promote environmental activism.

In implementing the project, ICSD is also:

- Reaching out to elected officials and Municipality staffs to invite them to attend.
- Expanding its online social-media campaign through Facebook, Twitter, and its blog;
- Conducting an extensive media campaign to our network of 600 Israeli and foreign journalists prior to – and after – each event.

The Interfaith Center for Sustainable Development.

INVITATION TO HIS BEATITUDE FOR PARTICIPATION IN THE ICSD.

His Beatitude Patriarch of Jerusalem Theophilos III,

I am writing to invite His Beatitude to speak as part of a panel at an Interfaith Climate and Energy Conference in

Jerusalem. The event is planned for this March 19th at 10am at the Konraci Adenauer Event Center in Mishkenot Sha'ananim. The time required for His Beatitude to be at the conference would be from 10 am to 11:15 am. The audience will include a significant media presence. I am including a document that describes more about the event. Please note that His All-Holiness Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew has recorded a video address special for this conference that we will be showing as a video.

I founded and direct *The Interfaith Center for Sustainable Development* accesses the collective wisdom of the world's religions to promote co-existence, peace, and sustainability through education and action. Rabbi David Rosen serves as a close adviser to our efforts. This past spring the Council of Religious Institutions of the Holy Land endorsed a statement on climate change that my organization submitted to it, and three members of the Council spoke in July at an Interfaith Eco Forum in Jerusalem.

In addition, we invite the participation of seminary students from the Orthodox seminary to participate in an upcoming series of seminars of

our Interfaith Seminary Students Sustainability Project. The seminars will bring together Christian, Muslim, and Jewish seminary students to undergo a transformative program focused on issues of faith and the environment in the Holy Land. I am attaching a document that describes more about the project for your consideration. Since the first seminar will be held on March 19th at the Conference, we would appreciate if His Beatitude could provide us with a response as to the participation of seminary students by March 1st.

Thank you in advance for your time and attention. Please provide a response by phone or email (and not by fax). I look forward to being in contact.

Sincerely,

Rabbi Yonatan Neril Founder & Executive Director

THE LETTER OF THE SOLIDARITY OF JCJCR TO THE PATRIARCHATE FOR THE HOLY CROSS CONVENT.

Jerusalem, 7 February 2012

Your Beatitude,

In sincere solidarity with the Christians of the Holy Land, the Jerusalem Center for Jewish-Christian Relations (JCJCR) strongly condemns the recent attack on the Monastery of the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate of Jerusalem in the Valley of the Cross this morning. It is an outrageous violent act of people who use the darkness of the night to hide their acts of vandalism. We condemn any attack of this group or others on any Religious Institution, private or public property. Especially as the Christian communities are a small minority living in the midst of an empowered Jewish majority, it is the responsibility of the State and its citizens to secure the life and the property of these communities.

These anti-Christian acts, expressed in this shameful way, teach us that there is need for more education among the Israeli -Jewish society and that we need to create more opportunities for dialogue between Christian and Jews in Israel. JCJCR is committed more than ever to continue with the long-term educational work necessary to root out the

negative attitudes towards Christianity and Christians in Israel, to promote tolerance and respect, and to develop peaceful environment in Jerusalem and in the Holy Land.

We hope the police will find those who are responsible for this violent act and will bring to justice the suspects. We are sure that many people in Israel share in this condemnation and would like to express their support for the Churches, the Christian communities and their leaders.

Respectfully yours,

Hana Bendcowsky, and the staff of JCJCR.

THE 10th GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE MIDDLE EAST COUNCIL OF CHURCHES IN PAFOS

From November 16th – 18th / 29th 2011 to December 1st 2011, the General Assembly of the Middle East Council of Churches (MECC) takes place in Pafos Cyprus. In it as known are involved four Christian Families, Orthodox, Latin, Lutherans and Prochalcedonians.

In the above mentioned General Assembly participates the Patriarchate of Jerusalem with His Beatitude our Father and Patriarch of Jerusalem and President of the Orthodox Family Theophilos, escorted by the Holy Metropolitan of Vostra Timotheos, representative of the Patriarchate in Cyprus, His Eminence Archbishop of Avila Dorotheos, His Eminence Elder Chief Secretary of Constantina Archbishop Aristarchos, Archimandrite f. Innokentios, Archimandrite f. Galaktionos, Archimandrite f. Nectarios, from Jordan Mr. Kamal Abu Jaber

and Ms. Ouafaa Ksous. Likewise, the Patriarchate of Alexandria participates with His Beatitude Patriarch Theodoros and escort, the Patriarchate of Antioch with a representative and the Church of Cyprus with His Beatitude Archbishop of Cyprus Chrysostomos with escort.

Main issues of the General Assembly are the place of Christians in the Middle East and the election of the new General Secretary. Details of the works will be posted at the end of the Assembly.

Chief Secretary's Office

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

DOHA'S NINTH ANNUAL INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON INTERFAITH DIALOGUE

By Anna Koulouris

More than 240 clergymen, scientists, politicians and scholars from 60 countries met on October 24th at the ninth annual Doha International Conference on Interfaith Dialogue sponsored by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Doha International Center Interfaith Dialogue and Qatar University.

The three-day event, held at the Sheraton Hotel in Doha, focused on social media's growing presence and effect on inter-religious dialogue. In the wake of the Arab Spring, the conference sought to evaluate social media's role in the revolutions and raise the question of whether such

communication technology could have a positive role in interfaith relations.

“It’s a must to discuss this,” said DICID chairman Ibrahim Saleh Al-Naimi in an opening address referencing developments in the Middle East since the beginning of this year. “There is a lot of communication and not enough dialogue,” he said.

Qatar’s Minister of Justice, H.E. Mr. Hassan bin Abdulla Al Ghanim, mentioned the importance of amplifying the positive aspects of social media and minimizing the negative.

“Without tolerance of the other, it can be a method of hatred,” said Al Ghanim.

Archimandrite Makarios, representative of the Jerusalem Patriarchate and priest of St. Isaac and St. George Greek Orthodox Church in Doha attended the conference, along with Deacon Dmitry Safonov from the Moscow Patriarchate.

“This is not just about co-existence, it’s about symbiosis, which is much more,” said Fr. Makarios. “It’s the fruit of this dialogue that we’re recognized by the State and live next to the citizens of Qatar.”

In the eyes of the Orthodox Church, the focus of the interfaith dialogue is for the people of not only Qatar, but the entire region, to be closer and know more about each other. It’s not only for the sake of knowledge of the other, but to cultivate symbiosis with those from different religious and national backgrounds, said Fr. Makarios.

In addition to Orthodox clerical representation there were lay people from Serbia, Romania and the United States present at the conference.

Workshops taught by experts in the field were offered for beginner and intermediate levels of proficiency in social media use throughout the conference. Meanwhile, main themes of

discussion included social media's history and development, positive and negative consequences, impacts on religious and local communities, and steps needed to create regulations within a framework of ethics.

Some addressed the implications of globalization on inter-religious dialogue, of which social media is an unequivocal part.

"The consequences of globalization are yet to be calculated," said Rabbi Henry Sobel of Brazil. Globalization doesn't foster true fellowship, although it can facilitate dialogue, he said, suggesting that nothing can replace a face-to-face encounter.

Dr. Aisha Al-Tayiab agreed with the panels that in-person contact is irreplaceable. "If people aren't brought up to respect others, they won't develop the proper ideas and behaviors later on," she said. But she was less critical of the role social media can play when it's used for positive social and political change.

As a Tunisian, she watched the impact of especially Facebook, on the youth of her country as they collectively pressured their president Zine al-Abidine Ben Ali to flee.

"I come from a country that experienced quantum leaps," she said. "Facebook in the first days of revolution was so important; it was a control room."

As the Tunisian example, along with many others has shown, young people have been most empowered by developments in social networking.

Hundreds of millions of young users are joining social media sites in a fraction of the time it's ever taken to mobilize mass groups of people in the past, and they upload years worth of content each day.

With secular movements on the rise in parts of the world, one

concern was where religious conversation can fit into the picture.

“The computer uses up a lot of productive time, especially from the youth,” said Bishop Sebouh Sarkisian from Iran.

He said that it was a duty of the churches, temples and mosques to teach morality and proper use of technology to the young people who will in turn make good use of the tools at their disposal and reach out to one another in acceptance.

Whereas young people might have an advantage in making use of the technology, it was suggested that the older generation can offer the wisdom and knowledge of the faiths that seem to lose their centralized authority in the virtual world of the Internet.

“Any communication between persons of differing religious points of view is sometimes described as dialogue – it’s not,” said Dr. Edward Kessler from the United Kingdom. “Once a message is posted online, control is lost and someone else may interpret what you’re trying to achieve as something else.”

A widely recognized problem with social media was its capability to create wedges between people. Several clergy members suggested that reaching out to others with love, as the Abrahamic traditions prescribe, generates more love, and that social media offers a unique chance to demonstrate love and kindness on a global scale.

“It’s not just a communication tool, it’s a connection tool,” said Professor William Vendley from the US. “The truly beautiful lies vested in the ugly.”

Several panelists gave examples of how their small grass-roots efforts reached a global scale due to the megaphone effect of social media. These projects, whether for charity or to combat stereotypes, transcended national and cultural borders.

“We speak of the Arab World, but in reality today – Arab community, European community, African community, Asia, US – we are inextricably bound,” said Jesse Jackson, African-American civil rights leader and Baptist minister. “We are one world.”

Reflecting on the past decade, Jackson labeled the transformation in the Arab world as a “bottom-up desire for change,” which was facilitated by social media. “Social media is serving to empower, inform and organize individuals and generated a feeling that change is real, can happen, and can be sustained.”

In the concluding session, final remarks were given by H.E. Abdel Rahman Mohammad Hassan Suwar Al-Dahab, former president of Sudan, Bishop Camillo Ballin of Italy, Professor Faruk Caklovica of Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Rabbi Herschel Gluck of the United Kingdom.

All participants of the conference were invited to attend dinner and tours of Doha’s Souq Waqif, Museum of Islamic Art, and cultural quarter Katara, where the Tribeca Film Festival will continue through the last week of October.

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