

SEMINAR ON ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION AT THE SITE OF THE BAPTISM OF OUR LORD ON THE RIVER JORDAN.

Upon the initiative and invitation of His Royal Highness Prince Ghazi of Jordan, a Seminar took place on Friday, the 11th/24th of September 2010, at the Conference Centre at the site of the Baptism of our Lord on the Jordan River.

Attending this Seminar were His Beatitude Patriarch of Jerusalem Theophilos III, Muslim theologians and academic theologians from Germany as well as the General Secretary of the Council of Religious Institutions of the Holy Land, Mr. Trond Bukkeviq.

At the Seminar issues were discussed regarding the protection of the environment generally, as the creation of God, and specifically on the issue of protecting the environment around the Jordan River, where human intervention is necessary.

On the same evening, His Royal Highness Prince Ghazi hosted a dinner at the prince's palace in honour of the invited participants of the Seminar. His Beatitude offered the Prince a gift of the publication by the notable Professor Dr. Demitrakopoulos entitled 'The Site of The Baptism of Our Lord on the River Jordan'.

Chief Secretary's Office.

MEETING OF THE REPRESENTATIVES OF THE COUNCIL OF RELIGIOUS INSTITUTIONS OF THE HOLY LAND.

On Monday, the 7th / 20th of September 2010, a meeting of the representatives of the Council of Religious Institutions of the Holy Land took place at the American Colony Hotel in East Jerusalem.

As it is known, this Council was created in 2005 and those participating are the Heads of the Christian Churches in the Holy Land, representatives of the Jewish Rabbinate of Israel as well as the Islamic representatives from the Palestinian Authority. The goal and purpose of this Council is the creation of an atmosphere of religious coexistence in the Holy Land and a contribution towards the solution of the political problem between Israelis and Palestinians and towards the maintenance of the religious status quo of Jerusalem.

At that meeting, on Monday, the 7th / 20th of September 2010, the following participated: from the Patriarchate of Jerusalem His Beatitude Patriarch of Jerusalem Theophilos III and the Elder Chief Secretary His Eminence Aristarchos Archbishop of Constantina; from the Armenians the Archbishop His Eminence Aris Servanian; from the Anglican Church in Jerusalem the Archbishop His Eminence Souhel Dawani; from the Roman Catholic Church, father Mandros Peter and the former Latin Patriarch of Jerusalem His Eminence Michel Sabah; from the Rabbinate, Rabbi David Rozen and the General Secretary of the Chief Rabbinate Mr. Odet Weiner; and finally, representing the

Islamic Faith Mr. Salah Zouhaika.

During this meeting a briefing took place given by the General Secretary of the Council Mr. Trond Bakkeviq regarding all the pacification activities of the Council. A particular update was made regarding the progress of work done towards the preparation of school handbooks for each religious and/or ethnic entity, Israeli and Palestinian, reflecting scientific objectivity without any religious or ethnic prejudice or bias, so that they would support the creation of a tolerant and conciliatory climate which is the prerequisite for the religious and/or ethnic coexistence in Jerusalem primarily and in the Holy Land in general.

The discussion of a topic that was on the Council Agenda, that of the excavations, was postponed for a more appropriate time and after more extensive preparation by the Council due to its sensitivity with regard to religious places.

Furthermore the topic of the Council's participation in the ongoing negotiations regarding the political problem was discussed. Regarding the process and the extent of this participation in these negotiations no answer was given because the method of participation is not known. Certainly, this participation will not have a political character, but an ancillary one with regard to religious topics and other topics that preoccupy the Religious Communities.

The next meeting for all participants in this session of the Council was set for the 2nd of December 2010.

Chief Secretary's Office.

PREPARATORY MEETING FOR THE 15th SESSION OF THE LUTHERAN- ORTHODOX JOINT COMMISSION – COMMUNIQUE

Bethlehem, Palestine, 25-31 May 2010

COMMUNIQUE

In preparation for the 15th session of the International Joint Lutheran-Orthodox Commission, the Preparatory Committee met in Bethlehem, Palestine, 25-31 May 2010, under the auspices of His Beatitude Patriarch Theophilos III of Jerusalem. This meeting continued the new phase in the Commission's theological work begun in Reykjavik, Iceland, in 2009.

At its 14th plenary meeting in Paphos, Cyprus, in 2008, the Commission decided to continue its work to "the Mystery of the Church" by focusing on "the Nature and Attributes of the Church" in 2009 and on "the Mission of the Church in 2010. The meeting in Palestine was to explore this second subject and to prepare a draft of a Common Statement on the topic for consideration at the next plenary session.

The meeting was chaired by the Co-Presidents H.E. Metropolitan Prof. Dr Gennadios of Sassima, Ecumenical Patriarchate, and Bishop Dr Donald McCoid, Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. The Lutheran World Federation (LWF) was represented by Bishop Dr Manas Buthelezi, South Africa; Revd Dr Stephanie Dietrich, Norway; Dekan Klaus Schwarz, Germany; Revd Prof. Dr Risto Saarinen, Finland (*unable to come*); Revd Prof. Dr Sarah Hinlicky Wilson, Institute for Ecumenical Research, Strasbourg, France (Consultant); and Prof. Dr Kathryn L. Johnson, LWF, Geneva, Switzerland (Co-Secretary). From the

Orthodox Churches the members were H.E. Dr Metropolitan Makarios of Kenya, (Patriarchate of Alexandria, *unable to come*); the V. Revd Protopresbyter Prof. Dr. George Dion Dragas (Patriarchate of Jerusalem); the V. Revd Archimandrite Dr Cyril Hovorun (Patriarchate of Moscow); the V. Revd Prof. Dr Viorel Ionita (Patriarchate of Romania); Prof. Dr Christos Voulgaris (Church of Greece), and the Revd Deacon Theodoros Meimaris, Ecumenical Patriarchate (Co-Secretary).

The Committee discussed its topic with the help of papers prepared by Revd Stephanie Dietrich, Dekan Klaus Schwarz, H.E. Metropolitan Makarios, V. Revd Archimandrite Cyril Hovorun and V. Revd Viorel Ionita.

Discussion of these papers identified broad areas of agreement between the two traditions on the subject of mission and also a number of differences and open questions. A Statement was drafted which will help the Joint Plenary meeting in 2011. In this draft paper the Committee discussed the various aspects of mission, from a Lutheran and an Orthodox understanding, always based upon their traditions and ecclesiastical and doctrinal teachings. Subjects examined in the Statement include "God's Mission and the Church's Mission," "Mission and the Unity of the Church," Mission as Witness (*Martyria*) and Proclamation," "Mission and Diakonia," "and "The Problems of Proselytism and Imperialism."

The members met in Bethlehem, the very place of Jesus Christ's birth in Holy Land. At the opening session, the Greek Orthodox Patriarch, His Beatitude Theophilos III of Jerusalem addressed the Committee, very warmly welcoming the participants and bestowing upon them the patriarchal blessing and wish for a very successful outcome results. He said:

It is significant that, in the course of these particular deliberations, you have made your first pilgrimage as a Joint Commission to the land in which the Church was first revealed, and just a few days after we have celebrated the Feast of

Pentecost, the coming of the "Paraclete," the Spirit of Christ...As the oldest continuous institution in the Holy Land, the Patriarchate of Jerusalem takes seriously our vocation of diakonia both to all those, regardless of religious, ethnic or cultural origin, who make this region their home, as well as to all those, of whatever religious affiliation, who come here throughout the year as pilgrims. In this ministry of diakonia to humankind and for the sake of the unity of all Christians, we extend to you our appreciation and encouragement.

On behalf of the Committee, Metropolitan Gennadios and Bishop McCoid expressed to the Patriarch Theophilos their deep thanks and gratitude for his generous hospitality. They recognized that it is for all a special blessing to hold this meeting in the Holy Land and in Bethlehem in particular, a place where Christianity found its beginning in Christ's Incarnation and birth. They also expressed their anxiety and sadness about the still unresolved political situation for the Palestinians, and for the wall which still exists, separating peoples and nations. The Committee affirmed the Patriarch's observation that the hope is in the Holy Land to be two states with three hearts and inspirations, Christianity, Islam, and Judaism.

On the final day, Bishop Manib Younan of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Jordan and the Holy Land, the LWF member church in the Middle East, warmly welcomed the members of the Committee to the Holy Land. He spoke about his vision for the mission of the Church in this place. He highlighted three aspects: the importance of education as a form of resistance to the growing attractions of extremism; the role of ecumenical cooperation for Christian communities who live in the midst of Jews and Muslims; and the centrality of justice. He urged the group to support the strength of groups like the Middle East Council of Churches in their efforts for reconciliation. His remarks were received with warm appreciation by the Committee.

Through a number of visits the Committee was able to learn

about the continuing faithful witness (*martyria*) of Christian communities in the Holy Land. In Bethlehem, the participants paid a visit to the Orthodox Monastery of the Basilica of Nativity of Christ and were generously received by the Abbot H.E. Archbishop Theophylaktos of Jordan. On Friday 28 May the Commission attended a Divine Liturgy in the place of the Nativity Church co-celebrated by Metropolitan Gennadios and Archbishop Theophylaktos, with the other Orthodox members. They also visited the International Center of Bethlehem, whose "Lutheran-based ecumenically-oriented" mission is to provide help and assistance in difficult circumstances through projects in the arts, education, and health and wellness. |

On the way to Jerusalem, the Commission visited the Monasteries of Saint Savva the Sanctified, of Saint Theodosios the Blessed, and of the Magi. In Jerusalem they visited sites on the Mount of Olives, the Holy Sion, and other holy sites. On Sunday the members attended the Divine Liturgy at the Church of the Holy Sepulcher and visited the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate of Jerusalem.

The Joint Commission will be hosted **31 May – 7 June 2011** by the Lutheran World Federation. At this meeting the Committee will celebrate its 30th anniversary since its beginning.

Bethlehem, Palestine, 29 May 2010.

HIS BEATITUDE VISITS THE PRINCE OF QATAR

In the context of His pastoral visit to Qatar for the inauguration of the hall and the laying of the foundation stone of the Church of Great Martyr St. George the Triumphant

and of St. Isaac the Syrian, on Friday, the 3rd /16th of April 2010, His Beatitude Patriarch of Jerusalem Theophilos III visited His Highness Prince of Qatar Hamand Bin –Halifa Al Thani.

The visit took place at the Palace of the Prince in a sincere and cordial atmosphere.

During this visit His Beatitude Patriarch of Jerusalem Theophilos III offered the Prince a silver and gold plated model ship symbolic, as He said, of the Emirate of Qatar surrounded by sea and to remind us of the effort in our transition from darkness to light and from slavery to freedom. His Beatitude also offered a precious volume of the History of the Patriarchate and addressed the Prince as follows:
<https://en.jerusalem-patriarchate.info/2010/04/14/766/>

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EASTER VISITS OF THE CHRISTIAN COMMUNITIES OF THE HOLY LAND TO THE PATRIARCHATE OF JERUSALEM

On Tuesday, 24th of March / 6th of April 2010, the third day of Easter, His Beatitude Patriarch of Jerusalem Theophilos III and the Brotherhood of the Holy Sepulchre received at the Hall of the Throne of the Patriarchate, the Christian Communities

of the Holy Land namely the Franciscan, Latin, Syrian, Anglican, Lutheran and the Ethiopian, with the exception of the Armenian who did not come, contrary to the usual Easter tradition.

His Beatitude, during His address to the other doctrines, emphasized that the Resurrection of the Lord is the utmost joyous worldwide event, which unites all people and encourages nations to establish peace between them. The leaders of the other denominations expressed their wishes to His Beatitude on the occasion of Christ's Resurrection and received from Him the customary Easter eggs.

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MESSAGE OF THE HEADS OF THE CHURCHES IN THE HOLY LAND

Alleluia! Christ is Risen. He is Risen Indeed. Alleluia!

We, the Heads of the Churches in the Land of the Holy One, share with you the Good News of the life of our local Christian Church as one Body in Christ who live the resurrection faith every day. Our message to you, whether near or far, is one of hope, encouragement and perseverance. We know the struggles so many Christians face, both here in this land and elsewhere in the world.

We know the power of despair. We know the power of evil. We know the power of the "principalities and powers" of this

world which promote agendas of division and oppression to bring harm to God's people throughout God's creation. We, with you, know the power of sin and death.

We also know the power of the Resurrection. We know the power of God to bring hope out of despair. We know the power of God in Christ Jesus, our Lord and Savior, to use forgiveness and love to conquer evil. We know the power of God in Christ to confront those same "principalities and powers" to promote faith, mutual respect, compassion and courage to speak the truth to benefit all of God's people. We know the power of the forgiveness of sins to redeem relationships in families and among the family of nations. We know the power of the gift of eternal life for all who believe.

Christians, in all generations, face many challenges. Our current generation is no different than those who have gone before us. We, with you, have great responsibilities and many obstacles. The Christian Church faces struggles here in this land and yet we continue to be full of hope that we are at one and the same time the Church of Calvary and the Church of the Resurrection. Our faith is not in the power of death, but in the power of the sacrificial life of Christ.

We encourage your prayers for us and all your Christian brothers and sisters, the "living stones" of all the Christian traditions, here in the Land of the Holy One. We ask you to pray for us in our struggle for justice, peace and reconciliation; so that when Jesus returns he will not again weep for Jerusalem but share in our joy of unity, respect and love for all people in the Holy Land. Be assured, at the same time, of our prayers for you.

May the one and living God: the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit bless, preserve and keep you, now and always. Amen.

Alleluia! Christ is Risen. He is Risen Indeed. Alleluia!

- + Patriarch Theophilos III, Greek Orthodox Patriarch
 - + Patriarch Fouad Twal, Latin Patriarch
 - + Patriarch Torkom I Manoogian, Armenian Apostolic Orthodox Patriarch
 - Fr. Pierbattista Pizzaballa, ofm, Custos of the Holy Land
 - + Archbishop Anba Abraham, Coptic Orthodox Patriarch
 - + Archbishop Swerios Malki Murad, Syrian Orthodox Patriarch
 - + Archbishop Bishop Jules Zerey, Greek Melkite Catholic Patriarch
 - + Archbishop Abouna Matthias, Ethiopian Orthodox Patriarch
 - + Archbishop Paul Sayyah, Maronite Patriarchal Exarch
 - + Bishop Suheil Dawani, Anglican Bishop in Jerusalem
 - + Bishop Munib Younan, Bishop of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Jordan and the Holy Land
 - + Bishop Pierre Malki, Syrian Catholic Patriarchal Exarch
 - + Fr. Rafael Minassian, Armenian Catholic Patriarchal Exarch
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MR. CHRIS SPIROU VISITS THE PATRIARCHATE OF JERUSALEM

On Saturday February 27th / March 13th 2010, His Beatitude, the Patriarch of Jerusalem Theophilos III, met with Mr. Chris Spirou, former Chairman of the New Hampshire State Democratic

Party in the United States of America, and President of the Hellenic American Union in Athens. Mr. Spirou is also President of the “International Congregation of Agia Sophia,” based in the United States. The mission of this world-wide movement is to restore the great church of Agia Sophia located in Istanbul (Constantinople), Turkey, as a functioning church of the Orthodox Christian Faith.

Mr. Spirou was accompanied by the Deputy Administrator of the non-governmental organization (N.G.O.) “Romiosini”, Dr. Aikaterini Diamantopoulou. Also present at the meeting was Dr. Fotios Demitrakopoulos, Professor of Byzantine Literature of the University of Athens.

His Beatitude, the Patriarch of Jerusalem Theophilos III discussed with Mr. Chris Spirou the present condition of the Holy Cross Monastery and its Library, as well as the “Holy Cross Theological Seminary”, which functioned between 1845 and 1909, and the prospects for its restoration and re-opening.

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ROCKSLIDE AT THE HOLY HOTZEVA – WADI KELT MONASTERY

On Tuesday, 16th/29th of December 2009, at around 23:00 a detached section of rock from the adjacent hillside fell on the roof of the Holy Monastery of Saints George and John of Hotzeva (Wadi –Kelt) in front of the entrance of the Chapel named in honor of Prophet Elias.

The fallen boulder caused the apses, in front of the chapel, to collapse and caused its roof to crack. The fragments of the boulder and the rubble from the church accumulated to the right of the courtyard as one enters the church.

Thanks be to God, at that time, no-one was present in the area where the boulder fell, as there would have been human fatalities, whereas now there is only structural damage to the buildings.

On Thursday, 18th/31st of December 2009, His Beatitude Patriarch of Jerusalem Theophilos III went to the Holy Hotzeva (Wadi Kelt) Monastery. This was the last day of the year 2009 and the day after the unfortunate incidents caused by the Armenians during the cleaning of the Basilica of the Nativity Church in Bethlehem, which fortunately had a successful conclusion for the Orthodox. His Beatitude was escorted to the Holy Hotzeva Monastery by the Elder Chief Secretary His Eminence Aristarchos Archbishop of Constantina, His Eminence Dorotheos Archbishop of Avila, the Archdeacon Fr. Athanasios and Deacon Filoumenos. His Beatitude venerated and then surveyed the resulting damage and discussed means of the buildings' restoration with the Superior of the Holy Monastery of St. Gerasimos and acting Superior of the Holy Hotzeva Monastery Rev. Archimandrite Chrysostomos, who was escorted with a small number of monks and volunteer supporters, whose morale was heartened by the Paternal words of His Beatitude.

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MR. OLAV TVEIT, THE NEWLY – ELECTED SECRETARY GENERAL OF WCC VISITS THE PATRIARCHATE OF JERUSALEM

On Thursday 27th of November/10th of December 2009, Mr. Olav Tveit, the newly-elected General Secretary of the World Council of Churches (WCC) visited His Beatitude and our Father, Patriarch of the Holy City of Jerusalem and all Palestine Theophilos III. Mr. Olav Tveit is from Norway and was elected as the new General Secretary of the WCC at the 59th Central Committee of the World Council of Churches that took place between the 26th of August and 3rd of September 2009. He fully assumed his duties on January 1st 2010, replacing the previous Secretary General, Rev. Samuel Cobia, whose term expired on the 31st of December 2009.

This visit took place within the framework of the PIEF (Palestine–Israel Ecumenical Forum), an ongoing initiative of the WCC. The PIEF was founded in Amman, Jordan, in June 2007 to contribute to the peace efforts in the Middle East.

At this 2007 meeting, Rev. Samuel Cobia participated as the Secretary General of the WCC, who then visited Jerusalem and the Patriarchate.

This peace initiative was continued at the General Meeting of the members of this Body in the city of Bethlehem between the 10th and 14th of December 2009.

Prior to the start of deliberations of this Section, representatives of the WCC visited the Patriarchate and invited His Beatitude the Patriarch to attend the beginning of

the General Meeting on Friday 28th of November/ 11th of December 2009.

The new Secretary General expressed his pleasure at visiting the Patriarchate, and expressed his gratitude for the Patriarchate's cooperation with the WCC. His Beatitude welcomed the new Secretary General and congratulated him on his election whilst reaffirming His will that the Patriarchate continues to cooperate with the WCC, as the most ancient and the only autocephalous Church in the Holy Land that preserves the religious character of Jerusalem as an open city for all nations.

His Beatitude referred to the problems that some Christian groups cause to the peace-making efforts in the Middle East, following extreme stances based on the literal interpretation of the Holy Scriptures. He also referred to the attempt of the Israeli Antiquities Authority to repair the closed exterior entrance of the western wall of the Church of Resurrection.

On the subject of inter-faith dialogue, His Beatitude said that "This is proper for other regions, but for us in the Middle East, something deeper is present, the peaceful symbiosis throughout the centuries".

"The Patriarchate is interested in matters and problems relating to Christians in the Holy Land", His Beatitude said, "and assists them by administering access permits to Jerusalem from the West Bank/Palestinian Territories, by means of scholarships for further studies, in assisting health institutions and others. He further continued, "On the matter of the city of Jerusalem we do not accept its exclusivity to anyone." His Beatitude then addressed the need of assisting and helping the Christians in Israel.

Mr. Olav Tveit expressed his thanks to His Beatitude for the role of the Patriarchate, a role of support and assistance to the Christians but also to members of other religions.

His Beatitude offered to Mr. Olav Tveit on the occasion of his election and visit a carved silver sphere depicting a miniature of the Holy City as a symbol of peace, and offered to the other representatives commemorative medallions in celebration of 2000 years of Christianity, as well as photograph albums documenting various ceremonies performed by the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate.

At the Lutheran's Church International Center of Bethlehem (ICB), on Friday 28th of November/11th of December 2009, the day after the visit of the Secretary General of the WCC Mr. Olav Tveit, the General Meeting was held by the members of the section PIEF (Palestine-Israel Ecumenical Forum), founded by the WCC for the promotion of peace in the Middle East.

His Beatitude arrived at the International Center of Bethlehem escorted by the Chief Secretary His Eminence Aristarchos Archbishop of Constantina, His Eminence Dorotheos Archbishop of Avilla, the Patriarchal Representative in Bethlehem His Eminence Theophylaktos Archbishop of Jordan River, Father Aissa Musleh, from the village of Beit Sahour who is the Patriarchal correspondent for the Arabic Media, deacon Fr. Athanasios, the distinguished businessman Mr. Aissa Zrekat from Kerak of Jordan and Mrs. Waffa Ksous Director of the Section of the Middle East Council of Churches (MECC) based in Jordan.

On the commencement of the programme, the Lutheran Bishop in Jerusalem Right Rev. Munib Yunan welcomed His Beatitude and all the participants at the Meeting. The General Secretary Rev. Olav Tveit emphasized the importance of continuance of the 'Amman Call', for the promotion and strengthening of peace, the importance of the meeting and especially in Bethlehem, the place where the incarnate Son and Logos of God, Prince of Peace, our Lord Jesus Christ was born.

"We are obliged", said Rev. Olav Tveit, "to utilize all the strength of the Spirit, which God poured in our hearts, in

order to send forth from this place a message of hope and optimism". With these words he then invited His Beatitude as Patriarch of Jerusalem, and as the President of the MECC, to bless the works of the Meeting.

His Beatitude Patriarch of Jerusalem Theophilos III then addressed the participants. (Please see the following link for the full text of His Beatitude's address <https://en.jerusalem-patriarchate.info/2009/12/11/606/>).

Messages were also given by the outgoing Secretary General of the WCC Rev. Samuel Cobia, the Secretary General of the MECC Mr. Jiries Saleh, from National Boards of Churches, and from Local Ecumenical Organizations.

The President of the Palestinian Authority Mr. Mahmoud Abbas was represented by the Chief of Staff, Dr. Rafiq Al-Husseini, who analysed the framework of the Christian-Muslim relations in the Middle East and the broader area, based on the treaty between the Patriarch of Jerusalem Sophronios and Caliph Omar Al-Hatab and the political impasse in the peace negotiations between Israel and the Palestinians.

The deliberations of the Meeting continued until Saturday, the 12th of December 2009.

Chief Secretary's Office

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HIS BEATITUDE PATRIARCH OF JERUSALEM THEOPHILOS III DELIVERS A MESSAGE OF PEACEFUL COEXISTENCE IN JERUSALEM

On Wednesday, 3rd /16th of September 2009, a ceremony was held by the Israeli Police at the Police Headquarters, next to the Russian Mission (Mascobiyeh), on occasion of the Jewish New Year. At this gathering, invited where also representatives of the Christian communities in the Holy Land and notables.

At the start of the ceremony, the Rabbi of Jerusalem spoke of the past year as being one of blessings but also of difficulties. The previous year with its difficulties has ended and a new one is coming. *"This period"* the Rabbi said *"is a time for forgiveness between us and God. We wish for good times to come, times of peace for Israel"*.

Following on, the Mayor of Jerusalem, Mr. Nir Barkat, spoke and said that it is a privilege for us to serve and live in Jerusalem, a city in the heart of Israel, upon which billions of people around the world focus. It is our duty to take advantage of this. The Mayor then thanked the Police for their cooperation, for their numerous activities and wished that the New Year to be one of joy, peace, security and a year of decreased disputes and contentions.

In conclusion the Mayor expressed his condolences to those families whose members, policemen, had fallen victims in the line of duty.

After this, His Beatitude Patriarch of Jerusalem Theophilos

III addressed the attendees on behalf of the Christian leaders of the Holy Land, as follows:

Address to the Jerusalem Police at Rosh Hashanah

His Beatitude Theophilos III

Patriarch of Jerusalem

16 September 2009.

“Mayor of Jerusalem Mr. Barkat

The head of the Jerusalem Police Mr. Franco.

Respected Members of the Jerusalem Police,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

As we celebrate the high holy day of Rosh Hashanah, we greet you warmly on our behalf on the behalf of our fellow Christian leaders here. We value our important relationship and the cooperation and good understanding that have long existed between us.

We recognize that yours is a complicated and frequently difficult job. The eyes of the world are so often focused on the Holy Places in this Holy City – a city that is dear and holy to Jew, Christian and Muslim alike. Even those who profess no religious belief understand the significance of Jerusalem for the entire human family. This means that your work is often in the spotlight, and that you are subject to unusually high levels that mistakes and shortcomings are quickly noticed, while faithful duty often goes unrecognized.

For our part, we salute you today for the responsible work that you do to keep public order, especially during the periods of the various holy days, religious celebrations, and civic holidays in the Old City. Whether it is Ramadan, or Passover, or Easter, the well-being of all depends on your

presence and judgment. Pilgrims must have access to the Holy Places during religious festivals, and the City must be safe and accessible for all.

We note with particular appreciation your duty during the recent Feast of the Dormition that coincided with the beginning of Ramadan. Every year, the crowded procession moves from the courtyard of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre to Gethsemane. There are always many pilgrims, and it is a challenge to manage such large numbers of people. This year everything went smoothly and uneventfully, and the pilgrims were deeply appreciative of the police. May the good experience and the handling of the safety of everyone at the Feast of the Dormition be an inspiration to us to ensure that proper accommodation is made also for the needs of pilgrims for the Ceremony of the Holy Fire.

As we reflect on this and many other similar occasions when your work has ensured the safety and security of so many, we encourage you to continue to maintain the highest standards of professional conduct and decorum in the face of your many and heavy duties. At this new year, may you deepen your commitment to the dignity of your profession as those to whom a great trust has been given.

The prophet Isaiah reminds us eloquently of “the heart of Jerusalem.” ‘Speak to the heart of Jerusalem’, says Isaiah. (Isaiah 40:1).

To us in our religious and spiritual mission, and to you in your civic responsibility, has the care of ‘heart of Jerusalem’ been entrusted. This is both a sacred and a public duty. We thank you for the role that you play in caring for the heart of Jerusalem, a heart that beats with life for all and especially for faithful of the three monotheistic Faiths, and we wish you and your families a happy and blessed New Year. Thank you”.

Chief Secretary's Office