

HIS BEATITUDE ADDRESS AT THE ANNUAL RECEPTION ON THE EVE OF THE NEW YEAR IN HONOR OF THE HEADS OF CHURCHES, HOSTED BY THE PRESIDENT OF ISRAEL.

30 December 2014

**Address at the Annual Reception on the Eve of the New Year
in honour of the Heads of the Churches
hosted by His Honour Mr. Reuven Rivlin
the President of Israel
with the Honourable Gilad Arden, Minister of the Interior**

Your Excellency, Mr. President

Your Excellency, Mr. Arden

Your Eminences

Your Graces

Distinguished Members of the Government and Civic Leaders

Ladies and Gentlemen,

In this joyous season of light, We greet you, Mr. President,
with the words of the Psalmist:

Your word is a lantern to my feet, and a light upon my path
(Ps. 118 (119): 105)

It is you who light my lamp; the Lord, my God, lights up my
darkness
(Ps. 17 (18): 29 (28))

The Holy Land, which is home to all of us, shines with the
divine Light. Here God and humanity have known a special and
unique intimacy. In this season in particular, the world,
caught up in the darkness of violence, poverty, persecution,

and war looks to us, the communities of the Holy Land, for renewed hope and inspiration.

Hope and inspiration must, of course, find expression in practical ways, so that we may address the very real needs and concerns of the people, whom we serve, both as elected officials and religious leaders. Our precise tasks as political and religious leaders may be different, but first and foremost our care is always our people. In this region, we recognize the diversity of our peoples, and we understand that the harmonious co-existence of the Abrahamic faiths is essential to the integrity of the Holy Land.

As we acknowledge the importance of this harmonious co-existence, we must make it clear that the Churches condemn all violence, all acts of terror, and all attempts to persecute individuals and communities. We also condemn all crimes that are committed against shrines, places of worship, cemeteries, and other sacred sites. The peace that we seek for our region can never be built on the foundation of such acts.

In the work of building a society based on peace, justice, and reconciliation, we have learnt the power of dialogue. To be engaged in constructive dialogue does not mean that we have to settle every question, or reach a full consensus in every matter. The power of dialogue rests precisely in the fruit that it bears.

The chief fruit of genuine dialogue is a spirit of deeper understanding. Dialogue reduces tension, eradicates prejudice, and promotes compassion. These fruits of dialogue are essential to the health of the human community.

The Christian communities of the Holy Land place dialogue at the centre of our common mission. Although divided in some respects, the Churches have been committed to dialogue, and are now enjoying the fruits of this endeavor. We have worked seriously to eradicate animosity and prejudice, and to heal

memories, and although this work continues, and there is still much to do, we have seen its results. Perhaps the most striking recent example of the fruits of our dialogue was the meeting earlier this year of His Holiness Pope Francis and His All-Holiness Patriarch Bartholomew in the Church of the Holy Sepulcher. This visible expression of common purpose was dialogue in action, and we cannot underestimate the power of such action to shape the consciousness of our people. When words fail us, our actions may speak more eloquently.

The Holy Land is a living witness to the dialogue between God and humanity. Here God and humanity have conversed down the ages. Here the divine presence has been made manifest among us. Here sacred history and eternity have met. In the divine-human dialogue we have the paradigm for our own dialogue among our different faith traditions and peoples. Dialogue in human affairs is therefore not a choice for us, but an inherent responsibility. Where true dialogue exists, the divine light shines brightly.

It is in this regard that the Status Quo has been, and remains, an essential foundation of true dialogue, and it is therefore the responsibility of all of us, whether in the civic or the religious sphere, to ensure that the traditional rights of all are upheld and respected. This Status Quo has deep roots in our collective history and consciousness, as well as sanctioned practices on the ground, which help to preserve the essential diversity of our region and beloved Holy Land.

In the interest of maintaining the Status Quo emerges the concern to ensure freedom of access for our faithful to the Holy Places for the celebration of the feasts of the Church. We indeed appreciate the difficult work of the authorities in maintaining safety and order, and we acknowledge the good will of many in leadership. But we also urge continued earnest attempts to find ways to expand and guarantee access for our respective communities and the many thousands of pilgrims who

come to the Holy Land to take part in ceremonies of worship throughout the year.

It should be mentioned that the Heads of Churches of the Holy Land do not represent ourselves and our respective communities only. We represent the entire Christian world. Under the universally acknowledged senior status of the Patriarchate of Jerusalem, we play a unique and crucial role as bridge-builders in the work of reconciliation and the deepening of co-existence throughout our region. It is precisely because of our collective role that Jerusalem and the Holy Land maintain their unique religious, cultural and ethnic landscape.

As we celebrate this season of light, let us remember that committed, respectful dialogue is the truest basis for the longing of all our hearts for peace and reconciliation.

As we greet you, Mr. President, on behalf of the Churches and Christian communities of the Holy Land on this special occasion, your first holiday season in your honourable presidential office, may God bless you in your new responsibilities, and may God bless our beloved Holy Land.

We wish you a happy and peaceful New Year. Hag sammeach!

Thank you.

His Beatitude
THEOPHILOS III
Patriarch of Jerusalem