

AN ADDRESS OF WELCOME TO THE PRESIDENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF SRPSKA.

Holy Jerusalem, January 17, 2012

Your Excellency, the President of the Republic of Srpska, Mr.
Dodik:

It is a pleasure to have you with us in this festive season of Christmas, the New Year, and of course the Epiphany holy day.

The Patriarchate of Jerusalem remains a beacon of hope for the world and for the Christian Orthodox people and nations in particular.

The Jerusalem Rum Orthodox Patriarchate enjoys great respect from the political domains of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan, the State of Israel, and the Palestinian Authority. And this is due to the fact that the Patriarchate serves as a religious and spiritual force of promoting the incarnate love of peace, justice, and foremost reconciliation between people of different cultures and religious affiliations.

Your Excellency, Mr. President, we welcome you here with your honorable colleagues not as a mere visitor but as a pilgrim to the Holy Land; the land where sacred history was revealed by the prophets and of course by the Incarnate Divine Logos, Our Lord Jesus Christ, where he preached, was crucified, and resurrected.

The Patriarchate of Jerusalem, being the Mother Church of all churches has been privileged to be the guardian and servant of the Holy Places that both bare witness to the Mystery of our faith and afford consolation and spiritual refreshment to thousands of pilgrims.

Mr. President, we are aware of the political developments that are taking place in your country as we are also aware of the realities through which our world is passing.

We would like to assure you of our prayers for the well being and progress of the national aspirations of your ethno-religious entity.

You are most welcome and we wish you a blessed pilgrimage and success in your visit to the state of Israel and the Holy Land.

Thank you!

THEOPHILOS III

Patriarch of Jerusalem.

AN ADDRESS TO THE DELEGATIONS OF THE CHURCHES AFTER THE FEAST OF THE NATIVITY.

Holy Jerusalem, 10 January 2012

Your Beatitudes,

Your Eminences,

Your Graces,

Dear Fathers,

Beloved Sisters and Brothers in Christ,

Christ is born! Let us glorify him!

We welcome you to our Holy Patriarchate in celebration of the Feast of the Nativity of Our Lord Jesus Christ, and we thank you for your words of greeting. This is the great celebration of God's self-emptying philanthropia – his supreme act of love towards humankind. In this great act of love God makes peace with us, and makes peace possible among us.

It was Saint Athanasius who said that "God took on our human nature so that we might share in God's own divine nature." It is by God's love of humankind that we are glorified.

It is our vocation to live this reality.

We, the Christians of this Holy Land, have been blessed and privileged by God's providence to be the guardians and the servants of the Holy Places down the ages. We bear witness to the truth of sacred history, and to the unique and universal event, the Incarnation of the Divine Logos, that has changed the course of human history.

The Christmas Feast is not simply a celebration of joy and happiness. It is more than just Santa Claus and Christmas trees! These give pleasure and excitement to our children, and this is important. But we are witnesses to a deeper truth that must always shine brighter than the superficial trappings of the season.

The truth of the incarnation is not an abstract idea. Quite the contrary; the divine truth of the Incarnation defines and determines the reality of peace, Justice, reconciliation and forgiveness among us. It is Our Lord himself who embodies these realities and makes them possible for us. We have the moral obligation, as those who dare to call ourselves Christians, so to live, and in our turn to pass on to our fellow citizens of the Middle East in general and of our Holy Land in particular, the message of peace, justice and love as we see them in the life of Our Lord Jesus Christ. We must be the living example, the chief agents of promoting this divine

philanthropia in our hurting world.

For our mission is to stand for

-peace against violence

-love against bigotry and hatred

-justice against injustice

-reconciliation against all forms of antagonism

In all this we must be, first of all, honest with and critical of ourselves. We do not have the luxury of petty differences or disagreements. We are called to a more rigorous discipline of self-emptying, after the manner of Cod himself. Only in this way shall we know “the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace” (Eph. 4:3). And only in this way shall the world see in us the light of Cod’s love of humankind. For as Our Lord himself says, “Let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven” (Mt 5: 16).

The eyes of the world are turned to Jerusalem and the Holy Land, especially at this time of the year, and peoples from many lands look to us for the embodiment of the special meaning and message of Christmas and the mystery of the Word made Flesh. We owe it to them, and to the communities in our care in this region, to be true to our mission.

May Cod bless you, and may we all know the joy of the Prince of Peace and the Sun of Justice in our hearts and in our beloved Holy Land.

Thank you.

His Beatitude

THEOPHILOS III

Patriarch of Jerusalem.

AN ADDRESS TO THE ARMENIAN DELEGATION AFTER THE CHRISTMAS FEAST.

Holy Jerusalem, 10 January 2012

Your Eminences,

Your Graces,

Dear Fathers,

“Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace among those whom he favours!” (Lk, 2:14).

In this Christnastide we greet you with the salutation of the heavenly host to the shepherds. This is the season of peace, peace between God and humankind, and peace between all people.

In this joyful season, we have the opportunity to apply to our life the words of Saint Paul: “forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the heavenly call of God in Christ Jesus” (Phil. 3:13-14). The Church is the extension in history of the Body of Christ, and ours is a heavenly call. This, and only this, must be our focus.

This season reminds us especially that we are fraternities in charge of the Holy Places, and we share a common mission together with the other Church fraternities and communities of this Holy City. Our common mission is to guard and serve the

Holy Places, and ensure that they are places of worship and devotion accessible to the whole world.

As Christians we face many challenges. One of the greatest challenges we face is the cynicism and indifference of the world. This is a cynicism and indifference for which we, in part, must admit some responsibility. Whenever we fail in our heavenly calling, we undermine the power of the Gospel to transform our troubled and anxious world. We must work all the harder to make possible what others think is impossible, but what we know to be the saving power of God.

We must admit this squarely, and not look for excuses. The current challenges in the social, cultural and political reality of our region are serious, and the future is unpredictable. We face both obvious as well as less evident threats to our very existence and mission, and we are under a more demanding obligation than ever to attend to those actions and circumstances that leave us open to criticism and negative perception. We are only harming the fabric of our historic existence.

We know that genuine dialogue, grounded in the Divine philanthropia of this holy season, is the firm foundation for the solving of family disputes. We must banish enticement, anger and impatience, and keep our eyes firmly on the Star that leads us to worship the Incarnate Logos.

We assure you of our prayers for the health and well-being of His Beatitude Patriarch Tarkom, and we wish you all a blessed Christmas and New Year.

His Beatitude

THEOPHILOS III

Patriarch of Jerusalem.

HIS BEATITUDE ADDRESS TO THE PRESIDENT OF ISRAEL & MEMBERS OF THE GOVERNMENT.

29 December 2011

Mr. President,

Honorable Ministers, Members of Parliament, Your Eminences,
Dear Reverend Fathers,

Distinguished Guests,

“For the sake of my relatives and friends I will say, ‘Peace be within you”. (Ps. 121:8)

We greet you, Your Excellency, and all gathered here, in this festive season. Our purpose is to celebrate the heavenly gift of peace that is so dear to our beloved Jerusalem. Jerusalem is the foundation of peace, and is the precious inheritance that we share as followers of the Abrahamic faiths.

We are honored to be here in celebration of the Holy Season and the New Year. The peoples of the Holy Land in general, and the Christian community in particular, are a living testimony to diversity that makes up our common life, and that is essential to the well-being of all. This occasion gives us the welcome opportunity to listen to each other in our common concerns.

The holy mission of the Churches embodies the uniqueness of the Holy Land. At once sacred and spiritual, this region is the home of three monotheistic religions: Judaism, Christianity and Islam. We know in our common life the reality of many

cultures and ethnic and religious diversity.

The mission of religious leaders throughout the ages has been essential in safe-guarding the religious character of Jerusalem. It is the role of religion to inspire political leaders to carry out their difficult tasks that are laid on them, for "there is no authority except from God" (Rom. 13:1). But it is also true that the clergy share the burden of leadership in their own moral and pastoral ministry. Just as political leaders must be shaped by the moral principles of their religious traditions, in the same way religious leaders have a role in forming individuals and congregations of faithful people in the exercise of responsible citizenship.

The recent tumultuous events in our region are a prophetic sign which we should all take into serious consideration. We have no choice but to ask ourselves what achievements we must accomplish today, and what leadership we must exercise in the face of these events. Leadership, whether political or religious, should constantly ask itself what can be done to prevent destructive forces from threatening not only our region, but our humanity as a whole. As spiritual leaders our preaching of reconciliation, symbiosis, justice, and peace must always find expression in practice. In other words, we must make courageous decisions now, on the ground for the sake of all, before it is too late.

Mr. President, we commend you highly in standing up against recent sacrilegious acts that were intended to harm the freedom of worship that is practiced in our Holy Land. Your action in condemning strongly all forms of bigotry and prejudice against places of worship, be they Jewish, Christian or Muslim, is a bright example for all leaders to follow.

Jerusalem is the uncontested, shared spiritual symbol of the world, and Jerusalem remains a refuge for pilgrims of all faiths who seek divine encouragement and refreshment of the soul. In this respect, we continue to be appreciative of the

efforts of the Authorities in facilitating access for pilgrims and worshippers. Allow us in this regard to underscore concerns that are common to our Christian community as a whole in which there can be further helpful progress:

- Regular access to Holy Sites;
- Entry visas for clergy;
- The honoring of the tax exempt status that is sanctioned by sacred history; and
- The historic standing of the "Ownership of Church Property."

We continue to affirm that the Patriarchate of Jerusalem, along with our sister Churches, can contribute decisively to stability, reconciliation, and lasting peace in our beloved Holy Land and throughout this region. This is amply illustrated by the work to which we as the Churches have made a commitment in the fully functional Council of Religious Institutions of the Holy Land. As Your Excellency knows well, this Council promotes mutual respect and understanding of each other's religious and cultural heritage, and does crucial work. We take this opportunity to express our thanks to Mr. Caesar Marie for his efforts to help our Community.

In this Holy Season, we uphold the message of the Incarnate Logos, that peace on earth is possible and attainable, for the Lord says "righteousness and peace will kiss each other" and "faithfulness will spring up from the ground" (Ps 85:10-11).

Mr. President, we express our sincere thanks to you for this cordial invitation and for your gracious hospitality. We pray God's special blessing on the approaching New Year: may our hearts be warmed, our minds enlightened, and the lives of all the citizens of the State of Israel be fulfilled.

Happy New Year and Hanukah Samech.

His Beatitude Theophilos III

Patriarch of Jerusalem

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**HIS BEATITUDE ADDRESS OF
WELCOME TO HIS EXCELLENCY
VICTOR YANUKOVYCH, PRESIDENT
OF THE UKRAINE.**

Jerusalem, 1 December 2011

Your Excellency, Mr. President,

Esteemed Members of the Ukrainian Delegation,

Your Eminences,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

“You have come to Jerusalem, the city of the living God.” (cf. Heb. 12:22)

We are glad to welcome you to the Patriarchate of Jerusalem, the senior Church institution of the Holy Land, and the Mother of All the Churches. The Patriarchate of Jerusalem embodies the history of Jerusalem, and as such the Patriarchate has remained down the ages the light of the City. For this light shines from the Holy Tomb.

The Patriarchate, together with the Brotherhood of the Holy Sepulchre, has been entrusted by Divine Providence with the ministry as guardians and servants of the Holy Places. As such, we represent not just ourselves alone, but the whole Christian world, and especially our Orthodox brothers and sisters in every land. All Christians, and especially Orthodox Christians, have a claim through the Patriarchate to the spiritual citizenship of Jerusalem.

Your Excellency, we welcome you as the leader of a great nation, with a remarkable history and a unique culture, where Orthodoxy has a noble heritage. In the formative years of this heritage, the Patriarchate of Jerusalem had an honored place and role.

As you make your State Visit to Israel, nevertheless we welcome you to this Holy Place as a pilgrim, and as a devout member of our Church. Your visit to us is an eloquent testimony to the importance of religion in the life of our modern society. The Scriptures remind us that we “do not live by bread alone” (Matt. 4:4), and religion enables human beings to find meaning in their lives meaning that is crucial for the well-being not simply of the individual, but also of society as a whole. For no society can long endure without the depth of meaning that true religion provides, and we all understand the role of religion in promoting peace, justice, and reconciliation.

We would like to assure you that we watch carefully the unfolding developments in your country and your region in both the civic and the ecclesiastical realms. The Church has always been a force of cohesion and unity in our respective countries, and in this respect we wish to emphasise that we are ready to make our contribution to strengthen this cohesion and further the unity of the Church. Let us, in the words of Saint Paul, “make every effort to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace” (Eph. 4:3).

We are happy that the brotherly relations between the Ukrainian people and the Patriarchate of Jerusalem are deeply rooted. This has no more visible expression than the many thousands of pilgrims from the Ukraine who come to the Holy Land every year, and whom we receive here on almost a daily basis. We see for ourselves the devotion of the Ukrainian people for the Holy Places and for the Patriarchate.

It is for this reason that we would like to take this occasion to bestow upon you, Your Excellency, the highest decoration of the Order of the Holy Sepulchre. May this be a sign of a bright future for relations between us.

We wish you a pleasant stay in the Holy Land, and every success in your mission.

We assure you also of our prayers for His Beatitude Metropolitan Vladimir, and through you we send our greetings to him.

May God bless you, and may God bless the peoples of the Ukraine.

Thank you.

His Beatitude

Theophilos III,

Patriarch of Jerusalem

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HIS BEATITUDE ADDRESS AT THE 10th GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE MIDDLE EAST COUNCIL OF CHURCHES IN PAPHOS, CYPRUS 29-30 NOVEMBER 2011

Your Beatitude Archbishop Chrysostomos,

Your Beatitudes,

Secretary General Mr. Girghis,

Your Eminence Metropolitan Georgios of Paphos,

Your Eminences,

Your Graces,

Reverend Fathers,

Dear Pastors,

Sisters and Brothers in Christ,

“Blessed is who comes in the name of the Lord.”

We are delighted and honored to be at this 10th General Assembly of the Middle East Council of Churches.

We wish to express our gratitude to our host, Your Beatitude Archbishop Chrysostomos II, for your welcome and your efforts in support of the work of the Council. We assure Your Beatitude of our fervent prayers for your primatial ministry and for the people of our beloved neighbouring country of Cyprus. We wish also to acknowledge Your Eminence Metropolitan Georgios of Paphos, in whose Holy Metropolis we are meeting.

As we gather here in the name of the Lord, we are focused on our theme of looking forward to the renewed life of the Middle East Council of Churches. Please permit us in this address to make a few specific remarks in this regard.

First, let us notice the work that has been accomplished by the Task Force over the past two years, especially with respect to restructuring the Council. This General Assembly will be examining this work and approving a way forward at this meeting. We also want to thank the member Churches for their financial help in enabling the Council to sustain its mission in this challenging period. We cannot continue without such financial support from all our members.

Having engaged in the crucial work of restructuring the Council, we must strengthen the capacity of the Council to foresee and anticipate problems and misunderstandings before they occur. This sort of internal foresight is fundamental to any healthy organization and we accomplish this best by effective meetings and communication. If they are caught early, most problems can be dealt with relatively easily and this is one of the primary goals of the restructuring work that has been done. Vigilance in this area of our work must remain high, because the unity of our mission must be clear to all.

As we move forward, we must also re-commit ourselves to the principle that the Council is not a vehicle for the agendas of individual member Churches or their leaders. As a Council, we respect the right of individual Churches and their leaders to speak and act as their circumstances dictate and we all have our own means for the discussion and publication of those matters that affect our own Churches and communities. Yet, at all times, with regard to the ongoing work of this Council, we are to keep our collective mission at the forefront of our work.

With respect to this mission, let us outline the way ahead as

we see it.

As the Churches of the Middle East, we have three broad responsibilities, which this Council exists to support:

1) As Churches, we have the prime moral obligation to oversee and pastor our congregations and communities. As leaders of the Churches, the needs of our people and their joys and hopes of the future must be our first concern and we must give our best efforts to this sacred ministry without delay. There is no time of distractions from this task and we must overcome our human weakness and give ourselves for the life of our people. This commitment lay at the heart of Our Lord's earthly ministry and as his followers we are bound by the same sacrificial and life-giving endeavor.

2) As Churches, we also have a moral obligation to all the peoples, cultures and countries of our region, regardless of their religious affiliation. The Christian Church in the Middle East, which has existed here without interruption from the earliest days, is native to this part of the world. We are not foreigners here, we are an essential part of the unique life of our region and our presence is an irreplaceable factor in the future stability of the Middle East.

Here we would like to remind this General Assembly of the pioneering work of many leaders and particularly of His Majesty King Abdullah II and His Royal Highness Prince Ghazi of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan, in the area of interfaith understanding and dialogue and we commend the work of The Amman Message, The Common Word Initiative and the new World Interfaith Harmony Week, which we shall observe on January 2012. We encourage the Council to be proactive in finding ways to participate in these activities.

3) And then as Churches we have a further moral obligation in the world. Peace and reconciliation in the Middle East are the responsibility of all, but as Churches and leaders we must

show the world not only that we are capable of leading our congregations, but also that we are capable of making our essential contribution to lasting peace and genuine reconciliation between Christian communities as well as between Christians, Jews, Muslims and all those who call this region their home. With respect to the work of this General Assembly, we shall be a living witness to the world in our ability to organize the effective mission of this Council. And so we see that the unity of our purpose and mission is essential not just to the work of the Middle East Council of Churches; It is essential also to building the confidence of the world in the ability of the Churches here to make our contribution to the reconciliation of our many religious and ethnic communities. The last several months of developments in our region, that is, in our respective countries, should be a clear message to us that, as a Council and as Churches, we no longer have the luxury of petty squabbles.

There are many ways in which we can accomplish the mission of this Council, but let us not forget the increasing importance of the use of the modern means of communication, like the internet and social media. Our website is one of our primary tools in this respect and through it we can reach around the world. We encourage this Assembly to ensure that the Council's website is user-friendly in a number of languages and up-to-date in the information it communicates.

In looking to the future of the Christian presence and its dynamics in our region, we understand the fear to the stability of the Churches that emigration poses. It is true that emigration diminishes the Christian population of the Middle East, but it is also true that the movement of individuals and groups has always been a part of our life and will doubtless continue to be so.

No less important is the future status of the Holy City of Jerusalem. As a city, as a spiritual and ecumenical reality and as a witness to the crucified and risen Lord, not only in

the Holy Land, but throughout the Middle East and beyond, Jerusalem is the focus of hope – the hope of all the people of the world. The future status of Jerusalem as a visible, tangible place of true symbiosis must be plain for all to see and this Council has a leading role to play in ensuring this.

As to peace and stability in our region, we must not forget Cyprus, where the need of reconciliation is as urgent as ever. We must do our best for a united and independent island, so that Greece Cypriot and Turkish Cypriot may live in the same peace, reconciliation and true symbiosis for which we hope for all peoples of our region.

My dear sisters and brothers in Christ, the challenges before us are clear; the mission of this Council is paramount. It is our fervent prayer that this Assembly will propose and carry out to a successful completion a specific plan to accomplish all these goals. As we have emphasized, our work together and the strength of the Middle East Council of Churches are of life-saving significance, especially at a time of inevitable change and serious threat to the Christian presence here.

The world looks forward to a renewed and strong Middle East Council of Churches. Let us not disappoint those, both near and far, who look to our Council for leadership in trust and hope. The stakes are high and it is inconceivable that we shall not rise to the challenges before us.

At this time, as the Churches are preparing in the Nativity Fast and the season of Advent for the celebration of the Nativity of our Lord Jesus Christ, may the One True Light, the Son of Justice that comes into the world enlighten our minds and warm hearts also, that we may be true and faithful witnesses to God the Father who loved the world so much, that he sent his only-begotten Son Emmanuel into the world.

Thank you.

Additional remark for an appropriate moment:

Please allow us also to mention the work of Father Ibrahim Dabour, who has seen the representative of the Patriarchate of Jerusalem to the Council for the last decade and who has given invaluable service to this work.

MEMBERS OF THE CITY COUNCIL OF JERUSALEM VISIT THE PATRIARCHATE

On Friday, November 5th / 18th 2011, a ten-member delegation of the city council of the city of Jerusalem from the party of Meretz, headed by the Deputy Mayor Mr. Jose (Pepe) Alala and the Board member dr. Meir Margalit visited the Patriarchate.

They were welcomed by His Holy Beatitude our Father and Patriarch of Jerusalem Theophilos. They on behalf of their parties, of Meretz, expressed to the Patriarchate their sorrow for the fact that several times fanatic religious Jewish spit the priests they meet.

His Beatitude appreciating their intention of standing by the Patriarchate, said that we as Christians have been called to love our enemies and to him who strikes we offer our right side and that by this stance of love and education, eliminating this bad habit is possible. The role of the Patriarchate said, is conciliatory and peacekeeping.

The above mentioned visitors conversing added that their party looks at Jerusalem as the capital of two states and three religions, Judaism, Christianity and Islam, as a model city from which "light will emerge to the world".

Answering His Beatitude said that the Patriarchate as well looks at Jerusalem as Its base and on a daily basis accepts numerous pilgrims Orthodox and non Orthodox as well as visitors Christians and non Christians, sending them a message of love, peace, conciliation and justice.

Moreover, His Beatitude drew their attention to the avoidance of actions on behalf of the City Hall or other Authority, aiming at the modernization of the Old City of Jerusalem and the distortion of its religious character.

They expressed their gratitude for the visit and their intention of all possible assistance.

His Beatitude offered them medals made for the 2000year history of the Patriarchate of Jerusalem.

Chief Secretary's Office

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

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A TEAM OF THE HELLENIC AIR FORCE VISITS THE PATRIARCHATE

On Thursday, November 4th / 17th 2011, a 50member team of the Hellenic Air Force (H.A.F) visited the Patriarchate.

This visit at the Patriarchate took place in the frame of the visit of the above team to the state of Israel for the cooperation of the military air forces of the two countries

specifically for the air operation exercise in the area of Ovda in southern Israel by the name of "burning and unburnt bush".

This visit to the Patriarchate took place with the cooperation of the Hellenic Embassy in Tel-Aviv. Spokesman of the Embassy, Colonel Nikolaos Kouroumanis accompanied the above-mentioned team. The above-mentioned team was accepted by His Beatitude our Father and Patriarch of Jerusalem Theophilos.

The head of this team thanked His Beatitude for the time he devoted for the visit to the Holy Land and to the Patriarchate and explained to His Beatitude that the success of the Mission of the team is attributable to the readiness of the armed air forces at any given moment to protect our homeland.

His Beatitude commended the members of the team on their devotion to the duty of protecting our country, on their success of their Mission and underlined the importance of their visit to the Holy Land and the Patriarchate.

The Holy Land stated His Beatitude, sanctified by the blood of the cross of our Savior Jesus Christ, safeguarded in centuries since the establishment of the first Christian foundation of the Holy Land, the Patriarchate of Jerusalem and the Brotherhood of the Holy Sepulcher, the Order of the Great. The Patriarchate and the Brotherhood perform in the Holy Land ecclesiastical, sanctifying deed through the Divine Worship, the sacraments, the education of the Orthodox congregation as well as peacekeeping and conciliatory among the conflicting ethnic and religious factors in the Holy Land.

Stating these, His Beatitude wished them to have with the grace of the Holy Sepulcher the power to protect the principles and values contested and shaken nowadays as the country, the Church and the family.

His Beatitude gave every member of the team icons of the Holy Sepulcher, the History of the Church of Jerusalem by

Chrysostomos Papadopoulos and other blessings from Jerusalem and medals of the two-thousand year anniversary of Christianity.

Chief Secretary's Office

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

**HIS BEATITUDE ADDRESS OF
WELCOME TO THE INTER-
PARLIAMENTARY ASSEMBLY ON
ORTHODOXY IN AMMAN, JORDAN**

Christian Communities in the Holy Land: Presence, Rights,
Fears and Hopes

H.B. Theophilos III Patriarch of Jerusalem

15 November 2011

Mr. Abdul Karim Dughmi,

Speaker of the Chamber of Deputies,

Mr. Sergei Popov,

President of the Inter-Parliamentary Assembly,

Your Eminences,

Dear Fathers,

Distinguished Members,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

How very good and pleasant it is when kindred live together in unity! (Ps 132).

It is great honor for us to address this assembly.

First, please allow us to express our gratitude to His Majesty King Abdullah II for the courageous steps that he has taken to ensure democratic principles and religious freedom in the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan and to provide leadership in a time of great change on our region.

We should draw on this great example of religious diversity and tolerance existing here in this beloved Kingdom and build further on the well-established initiatives that have culminated into the "Amman Message" and the "Common Word" which truly engaged both the opinion and efforts of communities around the world to strive to understand each other and see the religious diversity of the fundamental fabric of our society.

We also congratulate Mr. Dughmi on his recent election as Speaker of Chamber of Deputies of the Jordanian National Assembly, and we wish him strength and success in his new and important role.

My dear friends, since the founding of the Inter-Parliamentary Assembly on Orthodoxy, your Assembly has sought to keep the life and witness of Orthodoxy in the civic realm. The Articles of your Founding Act quite properly refer to the "ecumenical and unifying spirit of Orthodoxy" and the "unifying role" of Orthodox culture, as well as to your "support of human rights and religious freedoms" of all people both in Europe and around the world. (Founding Act, Article 3, Sections c, e and f). It is to these noble aims that we wish to speak today.

For millennia, the Middle East has been a special place. Here great cultures have arisen and here great religious traditions have met and shaped civilization. Judaism, Christianity and Islam have, quite literally, grown up together here over centuries. It is important for us to remember that Christianity is not alien to this region, but native to it..We are part and parcel of the unique cultural and religious make-up of the Middle East..

In spite of the fact that communities here are designated by religious affiliation and so appear to the outsider as distinctly separate from each other, let us not forget that they share a common history, as well as common linguistic and cultural roots and social customs. In this commonality, we begin to see the force of what in Greek is called symbiosis – a genuine living together in which many conventional categories are crossed as the people of this region live their daily lives, create families, do their work, seek to be faithful to their religious tradition and we are loyal to their national allegiance.

In just this environment of symbiosis do we see the “ecumenical and unifying spirit of Orthodox Christianity” in action. The mission of the Church in this region is, in part, to sustain and support this unique symbiosis so that all our peoples may live in peace, security and justice.

The Rum Orthodox Patriarchate of Jerusalem is the oldest continuous religious institution in the Middle East and we have been faithful to this mission, conscious of the power of the “unifying force” of Orthodox faith and culture.

This unifying force of Orthodox faith and culture is founded on an understanding of the nature of the Orthodox Church. The nature of the Orthodox Church is based on a relationship of autocephalous and autonomous Local Churches that fully acknowledge the integrity of each Church and therefore have succeeded over the centuries to live with a vibrant “unity in

diversity". This diversity by no means lessens the strength of the fabric of our unity.

This means that the gift of cultural, linguistic and national diversity which so characterizes the Local Orthodox Church is not a threat to the unity of the Church, but a testimony to the true nature of the "One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church and our witness throughout the oikoumene – the entire world. Wherever the Orthodox Church is, we are truly local and truly integrated in the culture and life of the people.

The Rum Orthodox Patriarchate of Jerusalem has always been faithful to our mission down the ages as the Local Orthodox Church of this region, the region of the Holy Land, which of course embraces the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan. We have a unique and precious integrity. Here we embrace in our own unity a great diversity and so we live the ecumenical and unifying spirit of Orthodoxy completely. Into this Local Church we welcome both immigrants from various countries who come to live here, as well as pilgrims from all over the world who visit the Holy Places and find spiritual refreshment.

The integrity of our unity in diversity has been threatened more recently by external powers. While we appreciate the concern that others have for the peace and stability of our region, we sometimes discern that, under the pretext of concern for the Christian communities of the Holy Land, these external powers are attempting to make inroads in order to promote their own political purposes. The best help is always founded on true and sincere respect and sensitivity to the nature of the communities one is trying to support. Unfortunately this respect and sensitivity are sometimes lacking.

We honor your good intentions to be aware of our life and to be of encouragement to the Christian communities of the Middle East. If you wish to be of real support to the mission of the Christian communities of our region, it is incumbent upon you

to ensure that the nations you represent and especially those that have an Orthodox heritage, are careful of your intention. We feel that we have to assay this, because the threat to our integrity comes sometimes not from the stranger, but from brothers and sisters.

The Rum Orthodox Patriarchate of Jerusalem, which has the jurisdiction over all Palestine as well as the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan is able and willing to be of assistance to all people of goodwill who seek to foster the mission of the Church. The Patriarchate is recognized by the political authorities of the Middle East as the senior Christian institution with a special role of leadership in representing the Christian voice of this land. Let us not forget that, from the very beginning, the Patriarchate of Jerusalem has been the guardian and servant of the Holy Places. As such it has played and continues to play, the primary role in guaranteeing the Christian presence in the Middle East with integrity. For, through our pastoral and educational efforts, the mission of the Church here is purely spiritual and religious.

However, in our humble opinion, the greatest threat to the ongoing life of the Christian communities here and in the broader area of the Middle East is the concern both for the fundamental issue of unity of religious communities as well as the future status of the Holy City of Jerusalem. We mention Jerusalem because it is at the heart of Christianity, as much as it is at the heart of Judaism and, of course, of Islam. We refer to Jerusalem because it is a unifying point of reference for all the Christian denominations and religious communities that make up the landscape of our region. Right up to our own day, Jerusalem remains the well from which we all seek to drink the deep waters of our Abrahamic traditions.

In any future for Jerusalem, the living presence of the Church is essential and we must do nothing that compromises the integrity of the Local Church and therefore of the local Christians. The focus of our Christian brothers and sisters

around the world should be the strengthening of our Christian communities, in and through the Patriarchate of Jerusalem which continues to live the “unifying role” of Orthodoxy here and around the world.

We are a people of hope. Here in this Holy Land, the Land of our sacred history, we encounter the living Christ in the life of the living community of the Church as well as in the sites that we associate with the life, ministry, passion and death of Our Lord Jesus Christ. We encourage you in your work as the Inter-Parliamentary Assembly on Orthodoxy to uphold the well-being, the unity and the unique mission of the Orthodox Church of this region. The Holy Places, common to all religious communities, are like a mother hen that gathers her children under her wings. For as long as the current status of the Holy Places is guaranteed and as long as the mission of the Rum Orthodox Patriarchate of Jerusalem is supported by our Orthodox brothers and sisters around the world, we see no reason to be afraid or hopeless. For this is the way that our privileges and rights are assured, while no discrimination befalls any other.

Once again, we welcome you. And may we learn even more completely to live the words of Our Lord Jesus Christ, who said:

Let your light so shine before others,

so that they may see your good works,

and give glory to your Father in Heaven. (Mat.5:16)

May God bless you and the nations you represent and may God bless our beloved Kingdom of Jordan and all our peoples.

Thank you.

THE MINISTER OF AGRICULTURE OF THE DEMOCRACY OF SRPSKA VISITS THE PATRIARCHATE.

On Saturday, October 30th / November 12th 2011, the Minister of Agriculture, Forestry and Water Management of the Autonomous Republic of Srpska, in the frame of the wider Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina, Mr. Miroslav Milovanović, accompanied by one of his counsels, under the Manager of the Office of Srpska in Israel Mr. Ariel Livne and by the Special Advisor of the Delegation of this country to Israel Mr. Aleksandar Nikolić, visited the Patriarchate.

His Holy Beatitude our Father and Patriarch of Jerusalem Theophilos cordially accepted him. The attendants of the Minister presented him to His Beatitude as the newly elected Minister with a broad and hopeful vision for work regarding the development of the environment of the Republic of Srpska in the sectors of agriculture, forestry and water management in cooperation with international organizations and with factors of the State of Israel where and for this purpose their visit takes place mainly emphasizing the cooperation with the Minister of Agriculture of Israel.

The Minister thanked His Beatitude for the time devoted by Him to accept him at the Patriarchate. He considers as he said the event of his visit to the Holy Land, the State of Israel and the Patriarchate, to be of utmost importance to his life and his political service.

His Beatitude expressed joy on this visit at the Patriarchate, the very ancient religious Christian institution in the Holy

Land which has always kept relations of good cooperation with the country and the Church of Serbia promoting the unity in Christ and Church of all the Sub-Orthodox Christian nations to preserve the diverse cultural, linguistic and other particularities and traditions. The Patriarchate said His Beatitude encompasses in itself the Revelation of the Old and the New Testament and practices in the Holy Land deed of sanctification for Its believers as well as peacekeeping and conciliatory for the multinational and interreligious environment where it lives. The Patriarchate has as its tactic to act in a conciliatory way for the healing of schisms within the Orthodox Church.

The escort of the Minister President of the Office of Srpsca in Israel Mr. Ariel Livne, who has recently celebrated his 90th birthday, greeted His Beatitude on behalf of the President of the Republic of Srpska and thanked him for the work that the Patriarchate of Jerusalem practices locally and internationally and for Its fine relations with the Republic of Serbska.

On this visit, the Minister gave His Beatitude an album with the cultural and forest treasures of Srpska and asked for His Blessing for the veneration at the Most Holy Sepulcher and the Holy Calvary.

Blessing them, His Beatitude gave the medal of the Patriarchate on the 2000-year anniversary of Christianity and the newly edited book of History of the Church of Jerusalem by Chrysostomos Papadopoulos.

Chief Secretary's Office

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

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