

REMARKS AT THE 'CHRISTMAS EXPERIENCE' AT THE ARMENIAN CATHOLIC CHURCH IN AMMAN TO BENEFIT THE DISPLACED COMMUNITY.

12 December 2015

Your Eminences,

Esteemed Members of the Diplomatic Corps,

Respected Leaders of NGOs in this region,

Reverend Fathers,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

In this season of hope as we prepare for the great Feast of the Nativity of our Lord Jesus Christ, we are here on this occasion to bring hope to some of the neediest in our midst. The words of the prophet Isaiah speak loudly to us:

The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light

Those who lived in a land of deep darkness-

on them light has shined

Isaiah 9:2

The displaced people in our midst, from Syria, Iraq and other countries around us, have been living and walking in darkness for some time now, and they look to God for the hope that the light of the incarnation brings to the world. They look also to all of us to be agents of that hope, and for the very practical assistance that they need to survive the horrors of war, persecution, violence and exile from their homes.

This “ Christmas Experience”, which has been organized by Ms. Wafa Goussous and our Patriarchal Office here in Amman is just one of the many ways, in which the Patriarchate of Jerusalem is engaged in humanitarian aid to the displaced community in the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan. As we know, the situation of the displaced has reached crisis proportions, and it puts an unbearable strain on the resources of the local infrastructure. The present situation requires the immediate and ongoing support of the international community as well as of local agencies so that all may be provided for.

As we extend this helping hand today to the displaced community in our midst, we remember that our Lord Jesus Christ, whose birth we are preparing to celebrate once again, was Himself a displaced person, and for the same reason as those who are displaced today. In the face of persecution and possible death, the infant Christ was taken by Saint Joseh and his Most Holy Mother into exile in Egypt, where they lived until it was eventually safe for them to return to their homes.

This is our prayer also for the displaced community, that after their exile here and elsewhere, then may at last be able to return to their homes and re-built their lives in their communities, where in many cases they and their families have lived for generations. In this time of their displacement, they must know from all of us that they are not alone, that we stand with them in their tragedy, and that we are working not

only for their eventual return to their ancient homelands, but are also giving them effective support to flourish while they are living among us.

In this season of hope, we renew our call to the international community, to governments and the diplomatic service, to do all in their power to continue and to broaden the services that need to be provided here and elsewhere in the region for the displaced community. These services include proper housing, educational institutions and programs, medical provision, employment training and opportunities, and especially a range of supports for children and young people to ensure that they do not slip through the cracks into the hands of those who will abuse them, recruit them into radical extremist groups, and perpetuate the horror that has gripped our region.

We are encouraged that the Foreign Ministry of Greece is establishing an Office for an Observer to monitor the situation in the Middle East, especially as it affects the Christian population of our various countries here. This is a positive and necessary step.

However, we cannot lose our focus. The Patriarchate of Jerusalem is able to make a modest contribution in support of the displaced community, but this contribution of the Church has a huge moral impact. We have the advantage of being able to deliver aid directly to those in need, without huge overheads and complicated bureaucracy. And because we are not affiliated with any government, and because ours is a spiritual and humanitarian mission and not a political one, we are open to partnerships with all. Through our Office in Amman, our staff, our clergy, and our local communities, we are able to reach the displaced quickly and effectively, and we invite other agencies to partner with us. Together we can have a much greater impact than any of us can have on our own. We stand ready. Help us to help those most in need. There is no time to lose in this work, and history will judge harshly

those who stood by.

It is in our power to help to redeem a desperate situation for hundreds of thousands of displaced persons. The pressure that we are under in this region has the potential to bring together both Christians of different Churches and confessions, as well as people of good will across the divides of faith, culture and ethnicity. As Christians we remember the words of Saint Paul, who said:

For we do not proclaim ourselves; we proclaim Jesus Christ as Lord and ourselves as your slaves for Jesus' sake. For it is the God who said, "Let light shine out of darkness," who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. "

May God bless the work that is done here, and may God prosper us all as we seek to bring the light of hope at a time of darkness.

Thank you.

His Beatitude

THEOPHILOS III

Patriarch of Jerusalem.