

H.B. PATRIARCH THEOPHILOS' III ADDRESS IN THE OCCASION OF THE "WORLD INTERFAITH HARMONY WEEK".

02 February 2011,

Your Royal Highness, Prince Ghazi Bin Mohammad Bin Talal

Honourable and Distinguished Guest,

It is a great honour for us, the Council of Churches in Jordan, to be amongst you today in this holy site celebrating the "World Interfaith Harmony Week". We affirm our deep appreciation for the efforts of His Majesty King Abdullah the Second to this great initiative. We hold dearly His Majesty's and the Hashemite Kingdom's continued heritage and commitment to freedom of worship and for progressing the bridging and understanding between faiths.

Furthermore, we are obliged to Your Royal Highness for this gracious hospitality and of course, for Your Highness's relentless efforts in promoting, both locally and internationally, this prudent initiative of His Majesty as well as its foundation and base represented in the "Common Word".

There is no doubt that our common humanity is today confronted with harsh forces of injustice, disrespect and even humiliation. This is all taking place under the cover of political and religious umbrellas and in the name of All-mighty God.

We are experiencing fast growing political polarisation resulting in religious polarisation. Violence, aggression,

hatred and bigotry, which produce unrest and insecurity, have taken the place of peace and justice, which produce security and prosperity.

Nevertheless, we believe that conflict, prejudice, hatred and injustice can be turned into peace, mutual respect, love and righteousness; for the Holy Scriptures commands us to: *“turn away evil and do good; seek peace and pursue it” (Ps. 34).*

The Middle East region has historically and religiously been declared a meeting place and a host of the three monotheistic religions; that is Judaism, Christianity and Islam. This is due to the fact, that the Middle East is inextricably associated with the sacred history of these faiths.

The Council of Churches in Jordan recall and evoke that Christians constitute an essential element in the composition of the social fabric and continue to contribute effectively to various walks of life in our communities.

This fact stems from a two thousand year old heritage in which we have played key roles in the civil, cultural and political realities of the Holy Land.

This legacy was built on mutual understandings, respect and tolerance between the Church and its surroundings, especially Islam. The culmination of such understanding has been shaped and formed by “al-Ohda al-Omariya” between the two great ethno-religious leaders: Khalifa “Omar bin al-Khattab” and Our predecessor Patriarch of Jerusalem Sophronius. This almost 1400 year-old agreement is still respected until today. What is the essence of this covenant that continues to resonate its impact in our contemporary reality? It is precisely the spirit of this covenant which allowed enough room to overcome and diffuse areas of human predicament and thus allowing for harmony between Christians and Muslims to flourish as well as heal historic turbulences and political unrest.

We believe it is time for the Spirit of “The Covenant of Omar”

to extend its borders and manifest itself in our modern and present times. Hence, comes His Majesty's initiative of the "World Interfaith Harmony Week" which was adopted unanimously by the United Nations General Assembly back in October of 2010. We consider these honourable values, articulated by His Majesty, as extensions of "al-Ohdah al-Omariyeh" and they constitute an outcome of the direct link between the Khalifa "Omar bin al-Khattab" and Jordan's King Abdullah Bin Al-Husseini.

Let us take advantage of all such gatherings, to encourage those who strive for peace to come and join forces with us, in order to promote peace and justice in our region and beyond, for the sake and benefit of the generations to come; for: "blessed are the peace-makers" (*Matth. 5, 9*).

We would like to jointly applaud the efforts of the Jordanian Interfaith Coexistence Research Centre, directed by the Reverend Father Nabil Haddad and all the many volunteers that contributed to this event's noted success.

Thank you.

His Beatitude THEOPHILOS III

Patriarch of Jerusalem