

# SECRETARIAT OF INTER-PARLIAMENTARY ASSEMBLY ON ORTHODOXY VISITS PATRIARCHATE

On the afternoon of Saturday the 6<sup>th</sup>/19<sup>th</sup> of October 2013, the Secretariat of the Inter-parliamentary Assembly on Orthodoxy visited the Patriarchate.

The delegation, consisting of approximately thirty-five members, was received by His Beatitude Theophilos in the presence of Fathers of the Holy Sepulcher.

During the visit, Secretary General Mr Anastasios Nerantzis pointed out that the Inter-parliamentary Assembly on Orthodoxy consists of distinguished members from twenty-five Orthodox countries, with Greece and Russia being the Assembly's pillars and guarantors.

In his address to His Beatitude, the President of the General Assembly, Mr Sergei Popov said:

“We are especially pleased to visit the Patriarchate of Jerusalem, the most ancient religious institution in the Holy Land. Its peacemaking, conciliatory and political role, since 451 AD onwards, we deeply appreciate, alongside the personal work of Your Beatitude”.

“We are also pleased over the fact that our paths cross, namely the path of the Patriarchate and the path of our organization, as we too aim and pursue the promotion of peace, change which is personal and social alike, and reconciliation. It is with emotion that we visit the Holy Sepulcher and the Patriarchate, in solidarity to its work in the flaring region of the Middle East and beyond”.

In His reply speech, His Beatitude expressed his joy over the

fact that the Orthodox Church is today assigned with an important role in the life of humanity. Its foremost task is man's healing, change, conciliation; it does not promote political interests or the objectives of globalization. This is the work of the Orthodox Church in its entirety, especially so of the Church of Jerusalem from where the Christian truth emerged as a message of peace, change and justice.

For its work the Patriarchate enjoys the respect and appreciation not only of the other Churches but also of political governments and religions in the area, Judaism and Islam. That is why the Patriarchate expects support and solidarity, not undermining. It maintains the sanctity of the All-Holy Sites of Pilgrimage which are not to be visited only as museums but also as functional spaces.

"The sites of pilgrimage are worthy of respect for Christians, Muslims and Jews", His Beatitude pointed out.

"Political and religious groups claim exclusivity to Jerusalem. Jerusalem, as we all know, is internationally a corpus separatum. For us, Jerusalem is the spiritual capital of the whole world" said His Beatitude and went on to add:

"[...] For this reason the Patriarchate plays a role in the settlement of the political status of Jerusalem. That is why we have been trying to convince our Orthodox brothers to support the Patriarchate and not use it to achieve political goals. I mean that the Patriarchate has offered blood and money for Christians. We happily receive both Orthodox and non-Orthodox pilgrims because their presence attests to the fact that the sites of pilgrimage belong to the whole world. There is in Jerusalem the paradox of multicultural tension and at the same time peaceful coexistence. The Patriarchate is the only autocephalous and indigenous Church, hence in it meet the most extreme with the most moderate elements".

At the end of his speech His Beatitude offered the President

of the Inter-parliamentary Assembly on Orthodoxy, Mr Sergei Popov, and Secretary General, Mr Anastasios Nerantzis, the “History of the Church of Jerusalem”, a depiction of the Nativity and icons of the Holy Sepulcher; He also offered Jerusalemite *eulogias* to all members of the Assembly.

Subsequently, the Inter-parliamentary Assembly on Orthodoxy left for two-day assignments in the city of Bethlehem where they visited the Basilica of the Nativity.

### **From the Secretariat-General**

<http://youtu.be/U2xJriV-qw>



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## **BETHLEHEM COMMUNITY COUNCIL HOSTS DINNER IN HONOUR OF HIS BEATITUDE**

On the evening of Monday the 1<sup>st</sup>/4<sup>th</sup> of October 2013, the newly elected Jamaiyie, namely the Council of the Greek Orthodox Community of Bethlehem, headed by its President in the presence of its thirteen new members, hosted dinner at its seat near the Basilica of the Nativity in Bethlehem, in honour of His Beatitude Theophilos, Patriarch of Jerusalem. HB was accompanied by the Patriarchal Commissioner in Bethlehem, His Eminence Theophylaktos, Archbishop of Jordan; the Elder Secretary-General, His Eminence Aristarchos, Archbishop of Constanina; Fhes hegoumen, the Reverend Archimandrite f. Hieronymos and the four Arabic-speaking Presbyters of the Community: f. Georgios Bantak, f. Spyridon Samour, f. Tziries

Martzouka and f. Issa Thaltzie.

At the dinner which was hosted in honour of His Beatitude and aimed at hand-to-hand cooperation on topics concerning the Community of Bethlehem, Jamaiyie President Mr Azmi Juha addressed His Beatitude in Arabic. This speech may be read here:

<https://en.jerusalem-patriarchate.info/ar/2013/10/14/2764>

Mr Juha also offered His Beatitude an exquisite icon of Theotokos. In response, His Beatitude extended his thanks for the icon and made a reply speech in Arabic, see:

<https://en.jerusalem-patriarchate.info/ar/2013/10/14/2765>

**From the Secretariat General**



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# **REMARKS AT THE FESTAL LUNCH IN CELEBRATION OF THE 1.700TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE EDICT OF MILAN.**

Nis, 6 October 2013

Your All-Holiness, Patriarch Bartholomew,

Your Holiness, Patriarch Irenej,

My Brother Patriarchs and Primate,

Beloved Concelebrants in the Lord,

Your Eminences,

Your Graces,

Reverend Fathers,

Dear Monastics,

The Precious Faithful of the Orthodox Church of Serbia,  
Esteemed State and Civic Leaders,

On the occasion of this great celebration of the 1 700<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Edict of Milan, we greet you with joy and with the blessings of the Holy Tomb of our Lord Jesus Christ. And we bring with us the prayers and best wishes of your fellow Christians in the Holy Land, with whom the Orthodox Church of Serbia has had a relationship that is generations old.

We recall the words of Saint Paul in the Letter to the Romans:

“If we have died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him. We know that Christ, being raised from the dead, will never die again; death no longer has dominion over him” (Rom. 6:8-9).

This is the glorious message of the Holy Tomb, the Light that shines forth to all nations. It is in this Light that we rejoice today in our gathering of the Primate of the Holy Orthodox Churches of Christ in this City of Nis, in our communion in Christ in the Patriarchal Liturgy that we have just celebrated, and in this wonderful festal meal.

Our joy and happiness are full when we remember that it is the Emperor Saint Constantine the Great, who was born in this city, who has brought us together. His native city of Nis takes justifiable pride in this great anniversary – and not this city only, but also the whole country of Serbia and the

Orthodox Church of this land. And as we celebrate his birthplace, we also recognize that Jerusalem became his spiritual home. There the name of Saint Constantine will be forever attached to the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, which was found, raised up, and honoured by Saint Constantine's mother, Saint Helena.

Our sense of pride in Christ for Saint Constantine the Great is absolutely justified. For when he received the full assurance of faith from above through the sign of the cross, like the Apostle Saint Paul, he abandoned the ignorance and the disrespect of his forebears, and took to heart the teaching of Jesus Christ of Nazareth. He received baptism, and in the year 313 he issued his justly famous Edict of Milan, the anniversary of which we celebrate today.

This edict has left an indelible mark for all time on the history of the Church and of the world. For this edict liberated the Church from the darkness of the catacombs, brought our life into the full light of day, and so helped the Church to be spread throughout every land, building great churches and monasteries. Among the first are the Church of the Anastasis in Jerusalem, and the Church of the Nativity in Bethlehem. Because of this edict the Christian religion, once it had been set free, became gradually the official religion of the Romano-Orthodox Empire.

The first Ecumenical Council was summoned and presided over by Saint Constantine. After his death the Church recognized his achievements, and with his mother, the Empress Saint Helena, the Church came to venerate them both as Godly-crowned sovereigns, Equals-to the-Apostles, and great saints of the Ecumenical Church.

In the person and work of Saint Constantine, we Orthodox Christians not only take pride; we also take him as our example, living as we do today in a society that is composed of a multiplicity of ethnicities, languages, and cultural

traditions and customs. From this great cultural richness we complete each other as members of the one, integral, undivided body of the Orthodox Church.

Let us listen to the words of Saint Constantine himself, who speaks to us across the ages:

“By guarding the divine faith, I partake of the light of truth. By being guided by the light of truth, I advance in the full knowledge of divine faith.”

(Eusebius, Life of Constantine 4.9 )

This is our vocation and mission today as Orthodox Christians, and our anniversary celebration is an encouragement to us to renew our efforts to be true to this inheritance of faith.

We commend to the prayers of the Most Holy Mother of God and Blessed Virgin Mary, the Godly-crowned Emperor Saint Constantine and his mother, the Empress Saint Helena, equal-to-the Apostles, the opportunities and challenges that lie before our sister Church of Serbia, as you work to overcome the difficulties that are placed in your way by powers that are opposed to the Gospel. And we pray that all our Orthodox Churches may grow in the bond of peace, so that we may increase and bear true witness to our Triune God in the entire world.

May God bless the Orthodox Church in this beloved land, and all her peoples.

Thank you.

HIS BEATITUDE

**THEOPHILOS III**

PATRIARCH OF JERUSALEM

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# **PATRIARCHATE OF JERUSALEM PARTICIPATES IN THE CELEBRATIONS FOR EDICTUM MEDIONALENSE 1700TH ANNIVERSARY**

During the period between the 21<sup>st</sup> to the 25<sup>th</sup> of September/ 4<sup>th</sup> to 8<sup>th</sup> October 2013, the Patriarchate of Serbia celebrated the 1700<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Edictum Mediolanense, issued by Constantine the Great (in 313 AD) who hailed from the ancient city of Naissos, namely present-day Nis, Serbia. The Edict of Milan allowed the Christian religion within the Roman state.

His Beatitude Theophilos, our Father and Patriarch of Jerusalem, accompanied by His Eminence Aristarchos, Archbishop of Constantina and Elder Secretary-General; His Eminence Makarios, Archbishop of Kattara, who had pursued theological studies in the Belgrade Faculty of Theology, and Archdeacon f. Athanasios.

His Beatitude and retinue, who arrived in Belgrade on the evening of Friday, the 21<sup>st</sup> of September/4<sup>th</sup> of October 2013, were received by His Beatitude Irinej, Patriarch of Serbia, in the presence of Prelates, Hieromonks and Hierodeacons.

During this warm reception, His Beatitude Irinej thanked His Beatitude Theophilos for accepting the invitation of the Church of Serbia to participate in the celebrations for the recognition of the Christian religion by means of the Edict of



Milan, adding he was particularly happy about the pilgrims coming from the Holy Sepulcher.

In response, His Beatitude Theophilos extended His thanks for the warm reception and for the reason that, beyond the significance of the Edict of Milan for the Church and the world, the very meeting of the Heads of Orthodox Churches or their representatives was in itself significant for further tightening their relations.

In the meantime, His Beatitude Anastasios, Archbishop of Albania, arrived, and was cordially received by the Patriarchs of Serbia and Jerusalem, who were still at the airport with their respective Retinues.

On the following day, Saturday the 22<sup>nd</sup> of September/5<sup>th</sup> of October 2013, Doxology was held in honour of the event at the great and historical Cathedral of Sts Taxiarchai which stands in the center of Belgrade, opposite the Patriarchate.

During Doxology, the Patriarch of Serbia addressed the Heads of Churches and their retinues, whilst the Most Reverend Irinej, Metropolitan of Baska, translated into impeccable ancient Greek. The Patriarch underlined the importance of the work of Constantine the Great and of significance of the Edict issued by him, as well as the significance of the Gathering of the Heads of Churches in his birthplace of Nis, with the aim of working together towards the resolution of problems and for a broader fraternal society in favour of justice, love and unity in the world.

On behalf of the Heads of Churches spoke the Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew in Greek, whilst the Metropolitan of Baska translated into Serbian.

After the *apolyxis* of the liturgy, a reception followed at the Patriarchate of Serbia.

From there, the Heads of Churches and their retinues visited

the Serbian President, His Excellency Mr Tomislav Nikolic. Mr Nikolic expressed his joy over the celebrations held by the Church and the State of Serbia as well as for the Inter-Orthodox participation.

Following a short rest break, the Heads of Churches and their Retinues left for the city of Nis. After a three-hour drive, they held Doxology at the Cathedral of Sts Constantine and Helena in Nis.

On the morning of Sunday the 23<sup>rd</sup> of September/5<sup>th</sup> of October 2013, an Inter-Orthodox Patriarchal Joint Liturgy was held at the forecourt of the aforementioned Cathedral. Participating in the Joint Liturgy were thousands of pious Serbs, led by their President, Mr Tomislav Nikolic.

At the conclusion of the liturgy, Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew made a speech.

Subsequently, the Patriarch of Serbia conferred the medal of St Constantine the Great, first class, to each of the Heads of the Orthodox Churches, and to the President of the Republic of Serbia, Mr Tomislav Nikolic. The Prelates accompanying the Heads of Churches were decorated with the medal of St Constantine, second class.

Lunch followed, during which each Primate made an address. The address of His Beatitude Theophilos may be read here in English:

<https://en.jerusalem-patriarchate.info/2013/10/11/3130>

Due to pastoral requirements, namely the feast of St Thekla, His Beatitude left on the morning of Monday the 27<sup>th</sup> of September/ 7<sup>th</sup> of October 2013, whilst His Eminence Makarios, Archbishop of Kattara, undertook to represent the Patriarchate in the rest of the festive celebrations of the Church of Serbia.

From Belgrade, His Beatitude flew for Constantinople with Turkish Airlines and from there arrived in Jerusalem during the early hours of Monday the 24<sup>th</sup> of September/7<sup>th</sup> of October 2013, in order to lead the procession for the feast of St Thekla, Great Martyr and Equal to the Apostles.

**From the Secretariat-General**



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# THE FEAST OF THE UNIVERSAL EXALTATION OF THE VENERABLE AND LIFE-GIVING CROSS

On Friday, the 14<sup>th</sup>/27<sup>th</sup> of September 2013, the Patriarchate of Jerusalem celebrated in great magnificence and glory the Exaltation of the Venerable and Life-Giving Cross, in remembrance of the fact that after it was found on the hill of the Horrendous Golgotha, and at the conclusion of the construction of the All-holy Church of the Resurrection, on the day of its dedication, it was elevated by Archbishop Makarios of Jerusalem and St Helena so that it would be visible to the great crowd of pious pilgrims who had gathered there from afar.

I: On the Eve of the Feast

On the evening of Thursday, the 9<sup>th</sup> Hour was read out in the monastic Church of Sts Constantine and Helena, followed by the official transfer of the Cross amid ringing bells (as shown in the highlight from the Eve of the feast) through Christian

Street to the All-holy Church of the Resurrection, its reception by His Beatitude Theophilos at the *Apokathelosis* [Removal of Christ from the Cross] the Incensing and the veneration at the Holy Sepulcher; the veneration by Prelates and members of the Synod at the Horrendous Golgotha, the ringing of the bells and incensing with myrrh of all sites of pilgrimage by deacons.

The rest of the Vespers Procession followed, with the Great Entrance and the Breaking of the Bread.

## II On the day of the feast

On the morning of Friday the 14<sup>th</sup>/27<sup>th</sup> of September 2013, at 7:00 am, the official transfer took place from the Central Monastery to the All-Holy Church of the Resurrection.

Upon entrance to the Church, His Beatitude Theophilos who led the rite, venerated the Holy *Apokathelosis* and the All-Holy Sepulcher; then, entering the *katholikon*, he gave blessings and rose to the Throne.

The divine Liturgy followed at the *katholikon*, led by His Beatitude Theophilos. Co-officiating were Hagiotaphite Prelates and the Most Reverend Panteleimon, Metropolitan of Xanthe, Hagiotaphite Priests and visiting Priests and Presbyters of other Orthodox Churches, as well as hierodeacons, in the presence of the Consul-General of Greece to Jerusalem, Mr Georgios Zacharoudiakis. Several pilgrims from Greece, Russia, Cyprus and faithful from the Church of Jerusalem participated in piety.

At the conclusion of the divine Liturgy, the rite of the Elevation of the Holy Cross began from the *solea* (passageway before the Holy Doors) of the *katholikon*.

Exiting the *katholikon*, the litany proceeded to the site of the discovery of the Holy Cross by St Helena.

There, His Beatitude elevated the Holy Cross to the four points of the horizon in order to sanctify the entire universe.

At the conclusion of the litany, participants proceeded, amid ringing bells, to the Patriarchate.

There, His Beatitude made an address in Greek, which may be found [here:](https://en.jerusalem-patriarchate.info/gr/2013/09/27/9473)  
<https://en.jerusalem-patriarchate.info/gr/2013/09/27/9473>

Spoken in Arabic by f. Charalambos, the speech may be read here:  
<https://en.jerusalem-patriarchate.info/ar/2013/09/21/2722>

### **From the Secretariat-General**

<httpv://youtu.be/XaKZx2ex2QE>



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# **THE FEAST OF THE NATIVITY OF THEOTOKOS IN THE TOWN OF BEIT JALA**

The feast of the Nativity of Theotokos was celebrated, due to pastoral reasons, at a day's delay, on Sunday the 9<sup>th</sup>/22<sup>nd</sup> of September 2013, in the Church dedicated to the Nativity of Theotokos in the town of Beit Jala.

The town, on the West Bank of the Jordan river, lies at a short distance from Rachel's Tomb, on the road from Jerusalem to Bethlehem. It numbers approximately 15.000 Christians and

Muslims, about 5.000 Orthodox, one church of whom is dedicated to St Nicholas, and the other to the Nativity of Theotokos.

To this holy church, which commemorates 150 years since its foundation, His Beatitude Theophilos, Our Father and Patriarch of Jerusalem, arrived from Jerusalem to lead the Divine Liturgy. His Beatitude was received at the Hegoumen's Quarters by the Hegoumen, Archimandrite Narkissos. Co-officiating were His Eminence Aristarchos, Elder Secretary-General and Archbishop of Constantina; His Eminence Theophylaktos, Patriarchal Commissioner in Bethlehem and Archbishop of Jordan; His Eminence Philoumenos, Patriarchal Commissioner in Irbet and Archbishop of Pella; the Hegoumen of Beit-Jala, Archimandrite Narkissos; the vicars of the Greek Orthodox Community of Beit-Jala, fathers Nikolaos, Georgios, Yusef and Pavlos; the Hegoumen of the Monastery of St George Beit-Jala, Archimandrite Ananios and other priests; Archdeacon Athanasios and deacon f. Eulogios. The choir of Beit-Jala sang under the direction of Mr Ibrahim Karkar and Mr Nindal Samaan, in the presence of a great crowd of pious participants from the Orthodox congregation in Beit-Jala.

During the Koinonikon of the Divine Liturgy, His Beatitude preached the Word of God to the faithful.

The ceremony was attended by the honourable Consul-General of Greece in Jerusalem, Mr Georgios Zacharoudiakis and the town's Municipal Authorities, Acting Mayor Mr Abu-Yusef and others.

At the end of the ceremony, a litany took place which had as participants a great crowd of faithful. Leading the litany were members of the Boy Scouts. A reception followed in the Parish Hall, with lunch offered at the hall of the Beit-Zala group.

**From the Secretariat-General**

[httpv://youtu.be/Q4W5W0\\_UsyQ](http://youtu.be/Q4W5W0_UsyQ)



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# **THE PATRIARCHATE OF JERUSALEM PARTICIPATES IN INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON ARAB CHRISTIANS IN AMMAN**

Between the 21<sup>st</sup> to the 22<sup>nd</sup> of August/3<sup>rd</sup> to 4<sup>th</sup> of September 2013, an international conference entitled “The Challenges facing Arab Christians” took place in Amman, Jordan, at the Hotel Royal, upon the initiative of His Majesty, King Abdullah of Jordan, through His Royal Highness, Prince Ghazi.

Discussed at the conference were problems facing Arab Christians in the Middle East areas of Egypt, Iraq, Libya, Jordan and Jerusalem.

Speakers at the Conference were first and foremost the Heads of Churches in the Middle East, and the Leaders of other Christian Churches. A list of the speakers may be read here: <https://en.jerusalem-patriarchate.info/2013/09/03/2989>

Among the Heads of Orthodox Churches, present at the conference were: His Beatitude Ioannis, Patriarch of Antioch, and Our Father and Patriarch of Jerusalem, Theophilos. His Beatitude the Pope and Patriarch of Alexandria was represented by the Most Reverend Benedict, Patriarchal Commissioner in Amman and Metropolitan of Philadelphia. His Beatitude the Patriarch of Moscow and All Russians was represented by the Most Reverend Theodosius, Metropolitan of Tambov and Rasskazovo.

His Royal Highness, Prince Ghazi, opened the Conference on Tuesday, the 21<sup>st</sup> of August/3<sup>rd</sup> of September, pointing out that Christians have become targets in various countries and that we ought to bear in mind that Arab Christians and Muslims have lived together as one nation from the time of the Covenant of Umar and together they have fought in the struggles of their homeland. Also, that the democratic legislation of Jordan provides both Arab and Christian citizens with equal rights and that when the Muslims came to Jerusalem, the Christians were already there.

Rev. Olav Fykse Tveit, General Secretary of the World Council of Churches, also spoke at the conference, saying how the Middle East is to the Council a unique region to which God was revealed through the prophets, Jesus Christ and the Apostles, therefore there is an urgent need to maintain peace in settling the conflict between the Palestinians and Israel.

After the end of the first session of the conference, participants were received at the Palace by His Majesty, the King of Jordan, Abdullah II. Welcoming his guests, the King noted that at a time when our region suffers from acts of violence, Jordan invites Christians and Muslims from across the world for the sake of peace, religious freedom, justice and prosperity; also for maintaining the identity of Christians and the character of Jerusalem, the Christian and Muslim deference of which Jordan has undertaken the obligation to protect.

During the meeting, the King decorated distinguished personalities participating in the Conference. The King Hussein of Jordan medal (2<sup>nd</sup> order) was awarded to the Most Reverend Benedict, Patriarchal Commissioner in Amman.

On the evening of the same day, the participants visited the Lord's Baptismal Site on the East Bank of the Jordan river, as well as the Monastery of John the Baptist, founded by the Most



Reverend Benedict, who hosted a dinner for them.

During the dinner, His Beatitude Theophilos, Our Father and Patriarch of Jerusalem, addressed his fellow diners in English. His speech may be read here: <https://en.jerusalem-patriarchate.info/2013/09/03/2956>

On Wednesday the 22<sup>nd</sup> of August/4<sup>th</sup> of September 2013, during the "Jordan and Jerusalem" Session, the Patriarch of Jerusalem read the following speech in English: <https://en.jerusalem-patriarchate.info/2013/09/04/2948>

As regards the challenges facing Arab Christians, all speakers at the Conference pointed out these general points:

That Jordan remains a paragon of a democratic state, securing and guaranteeing the peaceful coexistence of Christians and Muslims, and equal rights for both. That the Conference sends the message of religious freedom and mutual respect for the followers of all religions. That it recognizes and proposes the force of culture and not the culture of force. That Christians and Muslims denounce the use of violence among themselves or in the face of others.

That the Conference makes an appeal for the liberation of the Prelates abducted in Syria. That peace in the Middle East depends on the peaceful settlement of the Jerusalem problem. That schools need to cultivate reconciliation and acceptance between Christians and Muslims. That Arab States ought to encourage their Arab Christian citizens to not abandon their houses and become refugees.

That God cannot be found in power but in justice and truth. That the Church proposes to serve its members and the people. That respect for otherness is a requirement for peace. That the Muslims who came to Jerusalem in 638 AD encountered Christians, they therefore treat them with appropriate respect. That to apologize requires power of the soul, whereas

the inability to apologize reveals a weak soul. That Arab Christians ask to live as equal citizens in Arab nations and not as minorities. That the Conference promotes as values the peaceful coexistence of Christians and Muslims, religious tolerance, dignity, reconciliation and equality.

At the conclusion of the Conference, dinner was hosted by the Rum-Orthodox Group, under the presidency of Mr Raouf Abu Jamber, for all participating prelates and laymen.

**From the Secretariat-General**



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# **H. B. ADDRESS TO THE CONFERENCE “THE CURRENT SITUATION OF CHRISTIANS IN THE MIDDLE EAST”.**

Amman, Jordan- 4 September 2013

*Your Royal Highness,*

*Your Beatitudes,*

*Your Eminences,*

*Your Graces,*

*Reverend Fathers,*

*Dear Sisters and Brothers,*

We meet together at this conference in the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan at a crucial and delicate time in the history of the Holy Land and of the entire Middle East. Each day brings new risks and new opportunities, and there is laid upon our shoulders as the Heads of the Churches and Christian Communities a particular burden of leadership that we cannot and must not avoid.

We share a common humanity, and we share a common human destiny. The future will unfold with, or without, our cooperation and participation, and it is an imperative of both our religious and our cultural heritage that we are called to play our part in the shaping of our future.

Our focus is on the situation of the Christian Communities of the region, and we wish to emphasize three essential issues in the present crisis.

The first is the reality, which we constantly need to keep to the fore, that the Christian community of the Holy Land and of the Middle East is indigenous to this region and an essential part of the fabric of our society. We are not strangers or exiles here, and the native Christian community extends far beyond the strict confines of what we now designate the Holy Land. Indeed in parts of our region the Christian Church and its institutions are the oldest religious organizations in existence. We have been a continuous witness to the sacred history of this land.

This reality gives us a special mission both in our present challenges and in any future make-up of the society of the Middle East. We have no intention of abandoning our history, our heritage, our fellow countrymen, or eventually our life, let alone the Holy Places of which, by God's Providence, we are the guardians and servants. This is our common home, and we shall continue to live here together.

Our second point concerns the value of genuine co-existence

and respect. Whatever else the future brings, it will bring increasing inter-relationships. There will never be a time again when we shall have the possibility of living in our own little ghettos, cut off from those who differ from us either in culture, ethnicity, language, or religion. We shall all have to be able to share several "cultural languages."

But we of all people know this here, for this co-existence and respect is of the essence of this region. Here Jews, Christians, Muslims and others have lived side-by-side, spoken each other's languages, appreciated each other's customs, and shared common human values.

The threat comes to us not from our diversity, which is in fact a blessing to us. The threat comes to us rather from violence and extremism, and from those, from whatever quarter, who seek to overturn our common human values of freedom of religion and worship, freedom of expression, and freedom to live into the fullness of our God-given life and human dignity.

And thirdly we should like to remind everyone of the essential importance of dialogue. The future of the human community cannot be decided by arms, by violence, and by coercion. As His Majesty King Abdullah II said recently during his trip to the Vatican, dialogue is our only option, and we must strive with all our power in any sphere of influence that is open to us to ensure that dialogue, and not war, lies at the heart of the resolution to the difficulties that face us. The forging of our human future here in the Middle East will happen when we engage in the hard work of encountering each other in a dialogue that has about it the same dynamism of reality and purpose that we who are Christians understand to exist in the perichoresis that is at the heart of the mystery of the Incarnation of God.

Our ongoing response, in a word, must be expressed through divine grace and wisdom. We who are religious and spiritual

leaders must consider our rightful place alongside governmental and civic authorities both here in our region and around the world to find the solutions that will make for peace, stability, and that rightful coexistence that is at the heart of the strongest societies.

We take this opportunity to express our admiration and support of His Majesty King Abdullah II, who has given, and continues to give, his strongest efforts for freedom and peace not simply in the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan, but throughout the Middle East and beyond. As the Custodian of both the Christian and Muslim Holy Places, he has shown exemplary strength of purpose in ensuring the appropriate character of Jerusalem, the Holy Land, and our region, and he has made the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan a living paradigm of co-existence and mutual respect.

Finally we wish to repeat in the clearest possible terms the call to the international community that the Heads of Churches of the Holy Land made in our recent Statement concerning the situation in Egypt, and we need to broaden this concern now to include our neighboring Syria. Both these countries, which have lived the values of tolerance and respect for centuries, are now torn apart by extremism and seemingly uncontrollable factions. Every day innocent blood is being shed as innocent men, women, and children are being killed and terrorized, ancient communities are being obliterated, and precious and irreplaceable shrines and temples are being destroyed. Bishops, priests, monks, and nuns, and religious leaders of other traditions are being brutalized and martyred. Families are being torn apart, and many hundreds of thousands are now displaced.

This is not the way to any kind of future that is acceptable, and with every act of violence reconciliation becomes so much more distant. The international community has a moral role to play with us in this region in helping to end violence and to set the road to reconciliation and stability on a firm

foundation. Those who have the peaceful means to make peace must use all such means at their disposal for the good of all. For “blessed are the peace-makers.” This would guarantee the stability and well-being of the Middle East and the rest of the world.

Thank you.

His Beatitude

**THEOPHILOS III**

Patriarch of Jerusalem

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# **HIS BEATITUDE SPEECH AT THE BAPTISM SITE AT BETHANY.**

**The Baptism Site at Bethany-beyond-the Jordan, 3 September 2013**

**Your Excellencies, Your Eminences, Dear Friends,**

We gather today at this Holy Site in the aftermath of an important conference organized by His Majesty King Abdullah II on the situation of Christians in the Middle East.

We are living in a delicate time of the history of the Holy Land and of our region. On this occasion we wish to emphasize the crucial importance of the much needed resolution to the conflicts in Syria, the delicate situation in Egypt and not in the least the renewed dialogue and peace process between

Israel and Palestine. We know, as His Majesty the King has recently stated, that dialogue is the way to a secure and sustainable peace, and we must all wholehearted support all processes of reconciliation that are underway.

The way of dialogue is always complicated, and it requires of all participants a large measure of patience and sensitivity. But let us never forget what is at stake. For at stake is the very character of the our beloved Land, as well as the well-being of men, women and children, families and communities, and our rich and irreplaceable heritage.

We who are spiritual leaders and people of faith look to the future with hope, for we trust in the promises and the providence of God. This very Holy Land is a living witness to the God of our sacred history, who has made himself known here in a unique way. We proclaim our God to be the God of peace and reconciliation, and it is in this spirit that we support all efforts by people of good will to establish peace and reconciliation among all.

“Blessed are the peace-makers”, says our Lord. May God bless every good work that is done in the service of humanity.

We welcome you in our humble monastery and may God enlighten all our hearts.

His Beatitude,

**THEOPHILOS III**

Patriarch of Jerusalem

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# **INAUGURATION OF “SPIRITUAL CENTER” AT BETHLEHEM PILGRIMAGE SITE**

On Tuesday the 16<sup>th</sup>/29<sup>th</sup> of August 2013, the Spiritual Center of the Bethlehem Pilgrimage was officially inaugurated.

The Center is set up at a residence near the Basilica of the Nativity, and the Central Monastery of the Greek Orthodox located within. The residence was purchased and renovated by the Patriarchal Commissioner in Bethlehem, His Eminence Theophylaktos, Archbishop of Jordan.

The Center is intended to include various teaching and educational departments for the youth of the Arab-speaking congregation in Bethlehem (Rum Orthodox), i.e. courses on the History of the Holy Land, the Church of Jerusalem, the Holy Sites, Byzantine Music, computer literacy, foreign languages etc.

By means of these courses and other events to be hosted at the Center, young people will have the opportunity to meet and communicate with one another, overcoming isolation and alienation caused by the unstable political situation and financial adversities facing both Bethlehem and its environs.

The administration of the Center shall be undertaken by His Eminence Theophylaktos, Archbishop of Jordan, alongside selected associates from the Bethlehem congregation, i.e. theologian Mr Jandala Masri, and Mr Georgios Kharan with the blessing, approval and guidance of His Beatitude Theophilos and of the Holy and Sacred Synod.

The inauguration ceremony was preceded by a meeting of the heads of the three Communities – Greek Orthodox, Franciscan and Armenian – at the Bethlehem office of the President of the



Palestinian Authority, Mr Mahmoud Abbas – Abu Mazen, with his representatives, focused on working together on the manner in which officials and pilgrims will be received at the Basilica of the Nativity in Bethlehem.

Subsequently, the Patriarchal Commissioner in Bethlehem, Theophylaktos, hosted lunch for His Beatitude and retinue, as well as for high-ranked officials of the Palestinian Authority, Sheiks of the region, Mr George Bassus and to approximately two hundred members of our congregation in Bethlehem and other communities.

Lunch was followed by the Center's opening ceremony and the blessing of the water by His Beatitude.

On this very significant event for the life of our Greek Orthodox Community and all towns in Bethlehem, His Beatitude made a speech in Arabic which may be read here <https://en.jerusalem-patriarchate.info/ar/2013/08/28/2662> wishing success of the Center's objectives for the benefit of those partaking in its activities.

At the conclusion of His speech, His Beatitude was given a letter by the Judicial Assembly of the Palestinian Authority addressed to President Abu Mazen, wherein His Beatitude is praised for His cooperation towards peace, inter-religious coexistence and contribution to the Palestinian people. The letter, in Arabic, may be read here: <https://en.jerusalem-patriarchate.info/ar/2013/08/28/2665>

Upon leaving the Center, His Beatitude consecrated the Chapel of the Holy Innocents near the Basilica, recently renovated by Theophylaktos, Archbishop of Jordan.

**From the Secretariat-General**

