

RESPONSE TO THE GREETINGS OF THE HEADS OF THE CHURCHES AT THE FEAST OF THE NATIVITY.

Holy City of Jerusalem, 9 January 2013.

Your Beatitude,

Your Excellency,

Your Grace,

Your Eminences,

Reverend Fathers,

Dear Pastors,

Beloved Brothers and Sisters,

Christ is born! Glorify Him!

We welcome you with the joy of this Holy Season and we thank you for your greetings for the Feast of the Nativity. In the birth of the incarnate Logos, our Lord Jesus Christ, from the All-Pure Mother of God, the Blessed Virgin Mary, we celebrate once again the triumph of light over darkness, truth over falsehood, and goodness over evil.

We celebrate the Nativity of Christ once again at a time of ongoing, and deepening, uncertainty and difficulty for our region, especially in Syria. The political and social situation in which we are living in the Middle East makes our proclamation of the Gospel all the more urgent, and it makes our co-operation as Christians the more crucial.

Our peoples and our region are desperate for spiritual leadership and for the hope that the incarnate Lord brings. For the Nativity of Christ is not an event of the past; it is an event that is taking place today. As we sing in our Liturgy:

*Today the Virgin gives birth to the Transcendent One,
And the earth offers a cave to the Unapproachable One!*

(Kontakion for the Nativity)

We must not forget, too, that the world watches us at this season with a careful and expectant eye.

In one of his letters, which he wrote in the year 368, Saint Basil the Great praised the recently deceased Bishop Musonius of Neocaesarea. Saint Basil said of Bishop Musonius that during his life he had been *“a pillar of his homeland, an ornament of the churches, a pillar and support of the truth, a bastion of faith in Christ, the protector of his friends... [and] a guardian of ancestral laws.”* (Saint Basil Letters, 28:1).

May the same be said of us as Christian bishops and leaders. More than ever before we are called to live in the Light of the Eternal Son of God. For our struggle in maintaining our Christian presence in our region *“is not against enemies of blood and flesh, but against the cosmic powers of this present darkness of evil in the heavenly places.”* (Eph. 6:12). As St Paul says, we must *“keep alert, stand firm in [our] faith, be courageous, be strong”, “doing everything in love”* for the sake of the Holy Places of which we are guardians and servants (cf. 1 Cor. 13). This is the vocation of us all, members of our respective fraternities, as well as those of us who are bishops and pastors.

As Saint Basil said of Bishop Musonius, we must be *“bastions of faith In Christ”* those who so overflow with *“the grace of*

our Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God the Father, and the communion of the Holy Spirit," that all may see beyond us and our inadequate ministrations a glimpse of heaven. For at Christmas heaven comes down to earth.

We should never forget that we are first and foremost a liturgical community, and our celebration of the Feast of the Nativity in Bethlehem, inspires and makes real for all our people, as well as for so many pilgrims, the eternal and spiritual truths of the Incarnation. It is our privilege here in the Holy Land to express the true ecumenical spirit: the power of our unity rests in our spiritual and cultural diversity. This diversity is the true strength of our togetherness.

At this great Feast, may we join our voices, from the land of the justice and philanthropia of God that is Bethlehem, and the land of the hope and resurrection of God that is Jerusalem, in an appeal to all in authority to give their tireless efforts to work to stop the bloodshed of innocent people, to alleviate poverty, to clothe the naked, and give succor to widows and the orphaned around the world.

We pray to our newly-born Saviour Jesus Christ, that he may be born in the cave of our hearts today. May the true Light that is born into the world on this Feast be the same light that is reflected in us, so that the World may see our good works and give glory to our Father in heaven (cf. Mt. 5;16).

Christ is born! Glorify Him!

We wish you all a blessed and peaceful New Year-

Thank you" .

His Beatitude

Theophilos III,

Patriarch of Jerusalem

REMARKS FOR THE VISIT OF H.H. THE MAYOR OF JERUSALEM TO THE PATRIARCHATE OF JERUSALEM.

Holy City of Jerusalem, 3 January 2013

Mr Mayor,

Your Eminences,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

We are very glad to welcome you, Mr. Mayor, and your colleagues to Our Patriarchate during this festive season and in the first days of this New Year. This is a period of hope, peace and reconciliation for us all. It is in this spirit that we greet you today.

As the oldest continuous institution in the Holy Land, the Patriarchate is an integral part of community life in Jerusalem. The Patriarchate is a living witness to the fact that the Christian community is native to this region. We are part not just of past history; we are also bound up with the well-being and true identity of the current and future life and development of Jerusalem and the Holy Land.

This is clearly evident to those who share Our common history within Our Holy City and Our Holy Land at large. The legitimacy and role of Our Patriarchate of Jerusalem has long been inscribed and recognized regionally and globally; not

least by the existing heritage of the "Status Quo". In fact, these realities are amassing increasing visibility among all those beyond our borders who care for and long for peace, stability, security and genuine co-existence.

As the guardians and servants of major and preeminent Holy Places, the Patriarchate is upheld as essential to the sacredness of the City and its history. It is not an exaggeration to say that the Patriarchate is the beacon that draws thousands of pilgrims a year to the Holy Land. In this respect the Patriarchate underscores the freedom of access to the Holy Places not only for Christians, but also for Jews, Muslims and all people of good will. The Patriarchate is especially conscious of the large number of pilgrims who come here from Eastern European and Balkan countries, like Russia, the Ukraine, Romania and Serbia.

In this mission, the Patriarchate enjoys the respect and support of all, both in our region and around the world. In upholding our spiritual and moral values, we are accepted as the primate among the Churches in our commitment to reconciliation, peace and co-existence. We seek always nothing more or less than our legitimate heritage stemming from the sacred history of the Holy Land along with the rights and freedoms that enable us to carry out our Cod-given mission.

As we mark the New Year 2013 as well as Our own Christmas celebrations according to the Julian calendar, we wish to express to you, Mr. Mayor and your administration, our sincere appreciation for all that you are doing to ensure the genuine ethnic and religious diversity of our city, and not least your support for the Patriarchate. Needless to say that for countless generations we have been a strong and firm builder of harmonious co-existence between followers of Judaism, Christianity and Islam.

Being prudent not to enter into the temptation of isolationist thought and action, which can be distracting, We rather let

the spirit of true co-operation and collaboration thrive between us in this New Year, so that we may serve all those committed to our care, and show to the world that Jerusalem is indeed the city of peace and living religious and cultural diversity.

May God bless you, Mr. Mayor, in your work on behalf of all the peoples of Our beloved Jerusalem.

Happy and Blessed New Year,

Thank you.

His Beatitude

Theophilos III

Patriarch of Jerusalem

H.B. ADDRESS TO THE PRESIDENT OF ISRAEL & MEMBERS OF THE GOVERNMENT IN THE OCCASION OF THE NEW YEAR.

31 December 2012

Mr President,

Honourable Ministers,

Members of Parliament,

Your Eminences,

Dear Reverend Fathers,

Distinguished Guests,

“If any of you are qualified to be enrolled in our bodyguard, let them be enrolled, and let there be peace among us, (1 Mac. 13:40)

At the turn of the year, we greet you warmly in this season of renewal and hope, and we thank you for this opportunity to make these few remarks.

Events and gatherings such as this are of great importance both for celebrating the common bonds of our humanity, and for reminding ourselves of those fundamental values that are essential to our common life.

We are honored to be here with our fellow citizens of Jerusalem, and on behalf of the Christian Churches, the communities of Jerusalem, and all people of faith and good will, we extend our best wishes to you and to the people of Israel for the New Year.

The Christian presence is part and parcel of the history of this region, and the ongoing life of the Churches ensures the sacred uniqueness of Jerusalem and the religious character of the Holy Land as a whole. Our region bears witness to the Abrahamic religions of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, and is a living testimony to inclusiveness, and, most importantly, to ethnic and religious diversity.

Our continued mission of being the Mother Church of the Holy Land, in fraternal relationship with our brothers and sisters of other Churches, strengthens our singular historical presence. Along with other Churches, the

Patriarchate of Jerusalem serves and safeguards the Holy Places and consequently we also serve and secure the Christian presence both in our region and in the wider Middle East.

New realities are emerging from the unpredictable political and socio-economic developments of our region. There is a clear need and desire for our experience to be both an anchor and a paradigm for this future that is in the making before our eyes. We in the Holy Land have a moral obligation to present to the rest of the region a path that leads to genuine freedom of religion, inter-religious engagement, and mutual respect, for we have a heritage of living and working together that is generations old. It is not an exaggeration to claim that the future of our world is inextricably bound up with the future that we build in the Holy Land for all our people.

Our shared history has taught us that the road to peace is a dynamic process, that is to say, that it is not through violence, but through dialogue. It is dialogue that builds trust and mutual acceptance, and that shows us the way forward. Time and again we say that we condemn violence wherever it occurs, and the Patriarchate as well as the other Churches work whole-heartedly to build a lasting peace and security to which everyone, regardless of religious affiliation or cultural identity, is entitled.

Peace itself, the peace of which this Festive Season speaks and which we are all called to make, is not a single act. Peace involves the whole attitude and aspect of individuals, communities, and nations. It is a peace with and within the self, it is a peace with the whole created order, and it is a peace with one's fellow human beings. This sort of peace, which is in our Abrahamic traditions a reflection of the Divine, will always involve our complete, even sacrificial commitment. To paraphrase Saint Paul in the First Letter to the Corinthians, we can say this peace is a cause of our boasting (cf. 1 Cor. 9:15). For genuine peace to flourish we must lay aside every form of selfishness and fear. We must, as

it is said in the Greek Scriptures, outdo one another in kenosis – in emptying ourselves for the sake of others.

The legitimate rights, privileges and the ancient customs of the Church and our communities, sanctioned by sacred history, must not be disregarded, for they constitute an integral part of the living communities of this Holy Land and beyond.

As difficult as it is to articulate, we cannot hide our concern at the attitude of certain groups that take the law into their own hands with the sole purpose to cause confusion and disturbance to the harmonious co-existence to which we all aspire.

Mr President, we commend you highly in your courageous position against sacrilegious acts that have been directed against the sacred gift of freedom of worship that we enjoy in our Holy Land. Your actions and stance in condemning strongly all forms of bigotry and prejudice against places of worship, be they Jewish, Christian, or Muslim, is a clear example for all leaders to follow.

With such great efforts in building bridges of genuine rapprochement between our various communities, together we can work to inspire trust not only within our Christian community as whole but also with non-Christian communities as well. Be it access to the Holy Places, ease of travel for the clergy, and the relationship between our Church communities and civic and governmental offices, we have every confidence that these matters can be enhanced and taken into serious consideration.

Your Excellency, on behalf of all our Christian brothers and sisters, we thank you for your cordial invitation and your courteous hospitality. We pray God's grace upon the approaching New Year: may the Divine Spirit of this Festive Season enlighten our minds, warm our hearts, and lead us all to work diligently for the fulfillment of the lives of all the citizens of the State of Israel.

For “without faith it is impossible to please God, whoever would approach him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him” (Hebrews 11:6).

We wish you, Mr. President, and all the people of our beloved City and Holy Land the blessings of this season and a peaceful New Year.

Thank you.

His Beatitude

Theophilos III

Patriarch of Jerusalem

H. B. ADDRESS TO THE RECEPTION OF THE ISRAELI MINISTRY OF TOURISM FOR CHRISTMAS & NEW YEAR.

Holy City of Jerusalem, 17 of December 2012.

“Your Excellency,

Fellow Heads of Churches Brothers and Sisters,

Honourable Guests,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

There is no doubt that the Holy Land in general and Jerusalem in particular are the sacred place that we hold so dearly to our hearts. We all share the common belief in this sacredness and cherish it in our souls. We are honoured and consider ourselves privileged to serve in this great city and larger region.

In witness, Jerusalem is shared by the three Abrahamic faiths, that is to say Judaism, Christianity and Islam. In this respect it is unique and positioned to belong to the whole world. Thus it can be further said that Jerusalem is inclusive not only to the Abrahamic faiths but to all faiths and beliefs.

We in our capacity as religious leaders, do encourage the various peoples of the world to come and visit this Holy Land. We encourage them to come and partake in Jerusalem's experience of spirituality as well as participate in its religiosity.

We would like to commend all those who helped organise this gathering and We extend our thanks for this cordial invitation. We wish you a very Merry Christmas and a blessed New Year.

Thank you".

His Beatitude

THEOPHILOS III,

Patriarch of Jerusalem.

H.B. SPEECH: "REMARKS ON THE MEANING & INTEGRITY OF THE HOLY PLACES".

Haifa, 15 October 2012

Your Excellency, Mr. President, Distinguished Fellow Religious Leaders, Ladies and Gentlemen,

"Jacob said... 'Surely the Lord is in this place... How awesome is this place! This is none other than the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven. ", (Gen. 28:16-17).

We to whom the joy, the privilege and the responsibility have been given to live in the Holy Land are the guardians and the servants of both sacred history and of a God-given heritage. This is a history and a heritage that belong to no one people or tradition exclusively, but to the whole of humanity.

The unique circumstances of the co-existence of Jew, Christian, and Muslim in our region are the necessary sign to the world that the Holy Land is the home of every human heart, and the sum of all human longing.

There can be no doubt of the love that we who live here have for this land and for the Holy Places that are the tangible evidence to us that God has chosen to dwell among us. For in this Holy Land, each of us can say with the patriarch Jacob, "This is none other than the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven."

We have Holy Places that are special to our respective communities of faith, and which we hold in special devotion. And there are Holy Places that we share, for in the sacred history of this region there are many ties that bind us.

Whether the Holy Sites are specific to our respective traditions, or whether they are shared among us, they demand from us all equal attentiveness and protection. We dwell together in this land, Jew, Christian and Muslim, and in consequence we share a common destiny: what affects one community affects us all, for good or ill.

The Holy Places remind us that our region can never be a place of simple tourism. It has always been, and must always continue to be, a place of genuine pilgrimage. Even the casual visitor does not leave unaffected by the Holy Places. Here there is still the breaking in of God into our human existence; here countless people of faith, as well as those of goodwill who profess no particular faith, come face to face with eternity, and are changed.

We know, Mr. President, of your care for and support of all the peoples of the Holy Land, and your commitment to respectful, peaceful co-existence. As we have faced recent and disturbing desecrations of Holy Sites recently, we urge you to do all in your power and in the power of the authorities, to support the communities who are the guardians and the servants of all our Holy Sites.

The hearts and minds of all our peoples are shaped by the strength of our leadership in both civic and religious life, and we know of your concern for the integrity of the precious heritage of our beloved Holy Land. The world looks to the Holy Land in hope, and in ensuring the well-being of our Holy Sites, we allow the divine light that shines from our land to reach the whole human family.

May God bless us all as we seek to be faithful to our callings. Thank you.

His Beatitude

THEOPHILOS III

H.B. SPEECH AT THE RECEPTION IN HONOUR OF H.B. KYRILL I PATRIARCH OF MOSCOW & ALL RUSSIA AT THE PATRIARCHATE OF JERUSALEM.

Jerusalem, 11 November 2012.

An Address on the Occasion of a Reception in Honour of His
Beatitude Kyrill I Patriarch of Moscow and All Russia at the
Patriarchate of Jerusalem.

Your Beatitude, dear Patriarch Kyrill,

Your Eminences,

Your Graces,

Reverend Fathers,

Dear Members of the Brotherhood of the Holy Sepulcher,

Sisters and Brothers,

This evening, as Your Beatitude continues your patriarchal and
fraternal eirenikon to the Holy Land and to the Patriarchate

of Jerusalem, we remember the words of the prophet Isaiah:

Rejoice with Jerusalem, and be glad for her, all you who love her; rejoice with her in joy, all you who mourn over her -that you may nurse and be satisfied from her consoling breast; that you may drink deeply with delight from her glorious bosom", (Is, 60:10-11).

You have come to Jerusalem, dear brother, at a crucial time. As you know well, our region is experiencing profound change, change which brings with it an uncertainty about the future. As we live through this change, the role of the Church is fundamental to the ongoing well-being of all our peoples.

As the oldest continuous religious Institution in the Holy Land, the Rum Orthodox Patriarchate of Jerusalem embodies our sacred history. Since the time of the apostles, the Church has born witness here to the truth of the Gospel, and to the unique status of the Holy Places as spiritual signs to us of the birth, ministry, passion, death, resurrection and ascension of the incarnate Logos, our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. It is simply not possible to separate the life of the Patriarchate from the life of Jerusalem.

The Patriarchate is the Christian heart of Jerusalem, and as such the Patriarchate represents here the entire Christian world in general, and the Orthodox world in particular, Ours is a ministry of service, a true diakonia, for our ongoing presence ensures the spiritual integrity of the Holy Places, and free access to them for all people of good will. At this particular time in our history, therefore, we welcome your support and your encouragement as the Patriarchate of Jerusalem seeks to be a spiritual and moral guide to the peoples of the Middle East, as well as a stone of hope for all.

One of the religious obligations of the Orthodox world is to support and strengthen the Patriarchate of Jerusalem, which

provides in the Holy Land a spiritual oasis for the local Christian community, for pilgrims who come here and indeed for the international community.

Your eirenikon, dear brother, is just such an example of this support. In your person, by virtue of the grace of your patriarchal ministry, you bring with you to the Holy Land the whole Russian Church, a Church which, throughout the millennium of her life, has known both great triumphs as well as terrible suffering. The Russian Church bears in her soul the wounds of her Lord. This is the vocation of the Church everywhere, so to live in faithfulness to our Lord Jesus Christ that we are willing to suffer for the sake of the people of God. The Church has learnt to say with Saint Paul, "I consider the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory about to be revealed in us", (Rom. 8:18).

We rejoice in our shared inheritance with the saints in the One, Holy, Ecumenical and Apostolic Church. Here in this Holy City, on the Day of Pentecost, the inner strength of our unity in diversity was revealed. We rejoice that our God-given uniqueness as peoples with diverse cultures, languages, customs, and histories does not mask the common faith that unites us. The Orthodox Church is both local, and ecumenical, and our visible unity and fraternity is essential. If our unity is not clear to the world, we shall be unable to be an effective sign to the world of hope in the face of despair and seemingly intractable problems. Time and again history shows us that the Orthodox Church, when united in spirit and will as well as in faith, has the power to solve many of our human problems and show to all the path of light and life.

Rejoice with Jerusalem, and be glad for her, all you who love her.

As we remind ourselves of the words of the prophet Isaiah, we recall that the Patriarchate of Jerusalem maintains the

physical, cultural, religious and ethnic demography of the Old City. More especially we know that the Patriarchate guarantees the Christian character of Jerusalem and the Christian presence here and throughout the Middle East. In this way we embody the words of the prophet as we rejoice with Jerusalem and love her.

Pilgrimage is of the utmost importance, and is another way of expressing our love for Jerusalem. Your own pilgrimage, dear brother, is an example to the faithful. On the one hand, pilgrims have a unique encounter here with the presence of God at the Holy Places, and they learn the truth of our life here. And on the other hand, the visits of pilgrims greatly encourage us who live here, for pilgrimage is an undeniable proof that the world holds Jerusalem dear and precious.

As we reflect on your pilgrimage, and as we remember the place of Jerusalem, we remind ourselves that the Eucharist is at the heart of our common life. The Eucharist makes the Church, and the power of the Church is the Divine, Holy and Life-Giving Mysteries of Christ.

As Churches, our structures and administration are important – it is true. But nothing in our life should obscure the centrality of the common Chalice. The Divine Liturgy is the greatest treasure that our Lord left to the Church, and all our life points towards the Eucharist, and flows out of it, in ageless obedience to our Lord Jesus Christ.

We welcome you, Your Beatitude, to this Holy City, where our Lord gave us the Eucharist, the divine assurance of our eternal and indestructible destiny, and we pray with you that our Lord will remember us all in his kingdom, always, now and forever, and to the ages of ages.

We wish you the blessings of the Holy Tomb on your primatial pilgrimage to the Holy Land, and we assure you of our fraternal love and prayers in Christ.

Please allow us to present to you and to your party with these gifts, small tokens of our gratitude for your visit-Thank you.

His Beatitude

THEOPILOS III

Patriarch of Jerusalem.

H. B. SPEECH ON THE OCCASION OF A FESTIVE LUNCH IN HONOUR OF H. B. KYRILL I PATRIARCH OF MOSCOW & ALL RUSSIA.

Jerusalem, 11 November 2012.

An Address on the Occasion of a Festive Lunch in Honour of the Eirinikon of His Beatitude Kyrill I Patriarch of Moscow and All Russia at the King David Hotel.

Your Beatitude, beloved and dear Brother in Christ,

The Church of Jerusalem, the Mother all the Churches, and the Brotherhood of the Holy Sepulchre express our deep joy in receiving our sister Orthodox Church of Russia as Your Beatitude makes this eirenikon to the Holy Land. We rejoiced to receive you solemnly upon your arrival, and to concelebrate

the Divine Liturgy with you in the Church of the Holy Sepulchre last night. This is not your first pilgrimage to the Holy City of Jerusalem, but it is your first visit since your election as Patriarch, and we are delighted to welcome you back. For Jerusalem is the spiritual home of us all.

We welcome you as a brother bishop and Patriarch, but most especially as a pilgrim. The Rum Orthodox Patriarchate of Jerusalem is both the guardian and the servant of the Holy Places that you are now visiting, and we are dedicated to maintaining their spiritual witness and integrity for all. The Holy Places are Pan-Orthodox, for they gather Orthodox Christians from around the world. They are also Pan-Christian, for Christians of many confessions are renewed in their faith and commitment when they come to the land of our shared sacred history. And indeed they are universal, for many people of other faiths venerate the Holy Places with equal devotion, and many people of good will around the world look to Jerusalem as a refuge of hope.

The Holy and Great Sovereign, Saint Constantine Equal to the Apostles, made clear the reality of Orthodox Rum, and within this broad embrace all our Orthodox Churches have lived for centuries. On the one hand, we share a common faith and the common Chalice of the Eucharist, while on the other hand, we live with and respect the unique cultural, linguistic, and liturgical customs of each, as well as our distinct ecclesiastical jurisdictions. Just as we say in the words of the Liturgy of Saint John Chrysostom, "broken and distributed is the Lamb of God; broken but never divided," so we experience our local Churches as separate, but never divided.

This is the liturgical reflection of the blessing of our unity in diversity in which we live in the ecumenical Orthodox Church.

Our joy at your visit has been further enlivened by our concelebration early this morning of the Divine Liturgy and by

this festive lunch at this table in your honour, and in honour of your distinguished entourage. These gifts of the Liturgy and this lunch we receive with gratitude from our merciful God, who created us in his image and likeness, with both soul and body, a spiritual and material unity. We accept these gifts from our Lord Jesus Christ, who taught us to pray for our daily bread, which is both the bread of the Eucharist that feeds our souls, as well as the bread that nourishes our bodies.

As we enjoy this meal together today, we remember, as we are bound to do, all those who have no food, and all who are in any kind of physical or spiritual need. All around the world, there are many who suffer want, and it is part of the mission of the Church to attend as much to the physical needs of God's children as to their religious needs. Not far away from our doors here in the Holy land, we see the predicament of our fellow human beings who are displaced from their homes, who are desperate, and who are truly those of whom Christ said, "I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you gave me clothing". "Truly I tell you," said our Lord," just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me", (Mt 25:35-36,40).

We wish you, dear brother, every blessing from God our Father on your eirenikon to the Mother of all the Churches, that is the Patriarchate of Jerusalem, and on your ongoing pilgrimage to the Holy Land – a pilgrimage in which we see the renewal and the strengthening of our fraternal bonds of affection and unity. By your pilgrimage, you also strengthen the historic ties that have united the Church of Russia and the Church of Jerusalem for centuries. May our crucified and risen Lord continue to grant you grace for the mission and ministry to which he has called you, and may God bless the Holy Church of Russia and all the peoples of your beloved country.

We also wish to acknowledge the religious and civic

participants who are with us on this happy occasion, and we also thank the police for the smooth movement of your pilgrimage.

Allow us to raise our glasses to toast Your Beatitude and wish you Many Years.

Mnogaya leta, VIadyka, «Είς πολλά ἔτη, Δέσποτα».

His Beatitude

THEOPILOS III

Patriarch of Jerusalem.

ADDRESS OF H.B. PATRIARCH OF JERUSALEM IN THE “ISTANBUL WORLD FORUM”.

Istanbul, 14 of October 2012

Esteemed Fellow Participants,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

As we gather in this great city, the meeting point of Europe and Asia, we greet you with the peace of Jerusalem, a peace that is meant for the whole world. We are here as a testimony to history, and we acknowledge that we stand in the presence

of many who have the power to make history.

Our gathering presents a precious opportunity to deepen our commitment to the common ground we share, our common human condition, and the aspiration that we all have for a better life for the entire human family.

By virtue of our standing in our communities, the positions of leadership we hold, and the knowledge we have, we are able to shape in, and evoke from, our people enduring values and commitments. From these values and commitments in them and in their children, as well as in many circles of thought and in our cultures at large, come transformative actions in all walks of life.

Our meeting is indeed important and timely. For in the world at large, and in our region, there are dramatic developments that indicate a future that is, at present, unpredictable.

Our calling is to take responsibility, each in our own circle of significant influence, to make a better history for humanity as we live into this uncertain future. We do this primarily by choosing always to side firmly with peace, tolerance, and co-existence, and by holding fast to our common values. They are like a golden thread that connects our faiths. In these ways we can help to create the best possible future for all our peoples. Let us never underestimate the power that we have to do this.

Since we have been asked to speak from our experience, let us say this.

The Rum Orthodox Patriarchate of Jerusalem in the Holy Land is the embodiment of the history of Jerusalem, and has existed from the very beginning of the Christianity. As part of this history, it is no exaggeration to say that the well-known Covenant of Omar has played a crucial role since the convergence of Christianity and Islam in the Holy Land for 1400 years.

In 638 CE Omar ibn Al-Khattab, who was the second Khalifa, entered Jerusalem at the head of a Muslim army. He entered the city on foot, as a gesture of humility, and there was no bloodshed. On the contrary, those who wanted to leave were allowed to do so with their possessions and were guaranteed a safe passage, while those who wanted to stay were granted protection for their lives, their property, and their places of worship. The Khalifa Omar even took steps to ensure the continued future of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre as a place of Christian worship.

This is the most authentic version of the Covenant as established by the majority of Arab and Muslim historians, and we shall read parts of it because of its significance for our conversations here:

"In the Name of Allah, the Most Merciful, the Most Compassionate.

"This is an assurance of peace and protection given by the servant of Allah Omar, Commander of the Believers to the people of Aelia (Jerusalem). He gave them an assurance of protection for their lives, property, churches and crosses as well as the sick and healthy and all its religious community.

Their churches shall not be occupied, demolished nor taken away wholly or in part. None of their crosses or property shall be seized. They shall not be coerced in their religion nor shall any of them be injured...

He who leaves shall be guaranteed safety for his life and property until he reaches his safe heaven. He who stays shall also be safe, in which case he shall pay as much tax as the people of Aelia do.

Should any of the people of Aelia wish to move together with their property along with the Rum and to clear out their churches and crosses, they shall be guaranteed safety for their lives, churches and crosses, until they have reached

their safe haven... He who wishes to move along with the Romans may do so, and he who wishes to return home to his kinsfolk may do so.

Nothing shall be taken from them until their crops have been harvested. To the contents of this Covenant here are given the Covenant of Allah, the guarantees of His Messenger, the Khalifas and the Believers, provided they (the people of Aelia) pay their due Jizya tax.

Witnesses hereto are Khaled ibn Al-Waleed, Abdul-Rahman ibn 'Auf, Amr ibn Al-'Aas and Mu'awiya ibn abi-Sufyan. Made and executed in the year 15 Hijri."

The Covenant of Omar is significant in many respects, and we shall highlight several observations:

- 1) The document was signed by four of the most eminent companions of the Khalifa, while traditionally just two witnesses were sufficient.
- 2) Though concise, the Covenant is very detailed, well organized, clear and legally ordered, leaving no space for different or conflicting interpretations.
- 3) The wording leaves no doubt of the great importance that Omar attached to the duty of all to abide by its provisions.
- 4) Most importantly, of course, the Covenant provided for rights and privileges of non-Muslims. In an all-encompassing manner it provided for basic rights and freedoms, especially:
 - a) The freedom of religion, the safety and protection of churches and crosses.
 - b) The right to life and dignity.
 - c) The right to property.
 - d) The freedoms of ordinary citizens, providing that the

religious community abides by the laws of the State.

e) Full respect of other communities and the prevailing culture.

Later in our history, Salah al-Din, although he was a conqueror of Jerusalem and the Holy Land, also ruled with these principles.

So we see in the Covenant of Omar and in the attitude of many of his successors right up to the Ottoman period that this Covenant was renewed and reconfirmed by various firmans issued by the Sublime Porte. So the enduring values of the Covenant continue to be relevant to us in our day. For they have been respected and maintained by modern international agreements and by the States that have ruled the region of the Holy Land.

In conclusion, let us say this.

In light of all that our region is experiencing, the various ethnic and religious communities that have been at home in our region and have adopted the unique culture that has emerged from the co-existence of the religious traditions of their respective communities are anxious about the future. This is so because unexpectedly their established system of governance has shifted and has caused them uncertainty. This is why many are forced to flee a region that for them is their homeland.

In our understanding, the Covenant of Omar can once again be considered as a paradigm that gives us valuable insights in the manner in which we consider the role of religion and its free expression and practice. For instance, we must always uphold the mutual respect between our various ethnic communities, communities which are in fact defined by their religious tradition.

From our historical experience as the Rum Orthodox Patriarchate of Jerusalem, the Covenant of Omar has served as the basis of the ongoing life of Christians in Jerusalem and

the broader area of the Middle East. We do believe that an interpretation and application to our modern world of this document can be a viable basis for understanding the relationship of religion and freedom, freedom of religious minorities, with their appropriate rights and responsibilities.

This is how we understand the interaction between religion and freedom.

The Rum Orthodox Patriarchate is prepared to continue to support any means by which such firm bases for our common life and common destiny are strengthened, and we are grateful to this Forum for allowing us to highlight our concerns and away forward to which we are committed.

Thank you.

His Beatitude

THEOPHILOS III

Patriarch of Jerusalem

**ADDRESS OF THE HEADS OF THE
GREEK ORTHODOX CHURCHES OF
THE MIDDLE EAST TO THE**

PRESIDENT OF THE EUROPEAN COMMISSION MR. JOSE MANUEL BARROSO.

Brussels, 17th of September 2012.

Your Excellency,

We would like first of all to thank you personally and your colleagues for receiving us in your office today.

We have come here in our capacity as the spiritual leaders of the Christians of the Middle East, including, of course, Cyprus.

The actual purpose of this visit to you, Mr. President, is to raise awareness and discuss the unpredictable situation of the Middle East Christians, who in fact constitute an inseparable part of the indigenous local and regional population.

We are profoundly concerned about the predicament of the many thousands of Syrian refugees, among them a great number of Christians, who have taken refuge in countries like Lebanon and Jordan, countries that are under our spiritual jurisdiction.

Needless to say that we have been actively engaged, as church leaders, in helping and alleviating the terrible plight of the refugees, without any discrimination.

We, as members of the Middle East Council of Churches, have joined all our forces in order to financially and materially assist the refugees. For instance, a container of medical supplies, clothing and food from the Church of Cyprus is on the way to the Za' atari refugee camp, in Jordan.

Our Eastern Orthodox Church Middle East Office in Amman is

fully operational in this respect.

Mr. President,

We are here to share with you our own experience and make our appeal to every person or organization of good will for the need of the Christian presence in the Middle East, especially in Syria, Lebanon, Jordan, Iraq and Palestine and, of course, let us not forget Egypt and Africa. It is already obvious that the Middle East and its broader area has turned into a volcano in progress.

Ours is the moral and religious responsibility to manage to defuse, if not to stop the explosion of this politically and to be more precise, religiously explosive situation. We stress this because this constitutes part and parcel of the various concrete initiatives that we have already undertaken.

We firmly believe that the European Union and other international bodies have the ability to intervene and to put an end to the unnecessary bloodshed of innocent people and to any form of violence that is taking place supposedly in the name of God.

In this regard, please allow us to suggest the following actions that should be considered; a) promotion of education through relevant projects, i.e. schools, Universities and Cultural Centers for the academic study of comparative religion, b) combating prejudice and bigotry and in many cases cultural and religious exclusiveness, which are the symptoms of polarization, discrimination and hatred against the other.

The mission of the Greek Orthodox Patriarchates/Churches of the Middle East and Africa is of paramount importance, because our eastern Christianity does not bear the traces of imported and 'alien culture', that is to say Crusades and Colonialism. On the contrary, our compatriots and co-citizens have found us there. This is how we have culturally and historically grown up together. And this is why we reject the notion of 'Clash of

Civilisations'. ”

Once again, we would like to assure you, Mr. President, that we are willing and available, to cooperate with you and your services in working for peace and stability in our Middle East region and beyond.

His Beatitude

THEOPHILOS III,

Patriarch of Jerusalem

H. B. PARTICIPATION TO THE “ARAB SPRING & PEACE IN THE NEW MIDDLE EAST” INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE- CONSTANTINOPLE.

Istanbul, the 7th of September 2012.

His Beatitude Theophilos III address to the Institute for the Middle East Studies of Marmara University and The Center for the Islamic Research of the Turkish Religious Foundation, in participating to the International Conference:

“The Arab Spring and Peace in the New Middle East: Muslim and Christian Perspectives”.

“Your Excellency Prime Minister Erdogan,

Your Excellency Minister Gurmez,

Distinguished Participants,

Ladies and Gentlemen.

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 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 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 aspects of a State of a group of people, is not a threat to the unity of the region but a testimony to the true nature of the One.

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 Almighty God.

We are experiencing fast growing political polarization resulting in religious polarization. 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.

We look to 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.

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 have gathered at this conference to listen to one another. Throughout this conference we have been hearing speakers remind us, quite rightly, that it is a perversion of the fundamental tenets of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam to use these traditions to justify acts of violence and terrorism, and that it is the duty of those who do understand religion as a tool for peace to condemn violence quickly and without equivocation. We are called so to teach and preach that the faithful of our traditions understand clearly the role of religion for the building of just and lasting peace in our

world.

In the cause of resisting violence and promoting peace-building, the role of religious leaders, especially the clergy, is crucial, We do not believe that the clergy should behave like politicians; clergy have different, but equally serious ethical, theological and pastoral responsibilities.

But we do consider that, 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 congregations and communities of faithful people to exercise responsible citizenship. This role manifests itself at the grass-roots level through educating our congregations and the general public on the importance of peaceful co-existence; in providing social services that focus on the equality of all people regardless of religious or ethnic differences; in taking strong positions in denouncing violence; in leading and participating in public and private dialogue between different religions and ethnicities; and in supporting initiatives, institutions and leaders who are committed to the same social and civic good.

We thank you for this immense effort. We pray to the almighty God to enlighten in our deliberations and endeavors”.

His Beatitude

THEOPHILOS III,

Patriarch of Jerusalem.