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His Eminence Archbishop Elpidophoros Remarks at Receiving Appeal of Conscience Award

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My beloved friend and co-worker for peace and justice, Rabbi Schneier,

Distinguished Fellow Honoree, Marta Batmasian,

Your Eminences and Excellencies,

Esteemed Trustees of the Appeal of Conscience Foundation,

Dear Friends,

To participate in the essential work of the Appeal of Conscience Foundation, under the wise and judicious eye of its founder, Rabbi Arthur Schneier, is a privilege for which words fail. To receive this evening's recognition even more so, for the extraordinary company of past recipients reads like a "Who's Who" of the world's political, financial, and spiritual consummate leadership.

Dear Rabbi, I am deeply gratified that you have chosen to honor my humble person with an Award that speaks volumes about your work through the decades, and echoes around the world, recalling the human family again and again back to its best self.

I accept this award on behalf of the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America, the First Eparchy of the Mother Church of Constantinople in the New World, and a longtime partner with the Appeal of Conscience Foundation. Our dear friend, John Catsimatidis, has long been a bridge between the two and I thank him for his warm introduction this evening.

I have had the privilege to know Rabbi Schneier for many decades, since my time as a young deacon serving at the Ecumenical Patriarchate under the exceptional worldwide leader of Orthodox Christianity, His All-Holiness Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew, a close friend and collaborator of the Rabbi.

In 1994, with Rabbi Schneier's leadership, the Bosphorus Declaration – that states "a crime committed in the name of religion is a crime against religion" – was signed

in Istanbul at the conclusion of the Conference on Peace and Tolerance: Central Asia, Caucasus and the Balkans. This most significant statement was a critical step in what has been the journey of the Appeal of Conscience Foundation's methodical and careful work to ensure that religious and spiritual traditions are protected and not abused for the sake of political and even terroristic ambitions.

As Archbishop of America for the Greek Orthodox Church and as Chairman of the Assembly of Canonical Orthodox Bishops in the United States, I have taken an uncompromising stand in defense of Ukraine and against the politicization of the Orthodox Faith by anyone seeking to justify this unjust and unnecessary war by Russia on the sovereign nation of Ukraine. When we hear expressions like "holy war" and "crusade," we are hearing tribalist voices that should no longer be welcome in the modern world. The high standards of the Appeal of Conscience Foundation expose such language for what it is – the grasping for worldly power that exploits people of faith.

I am proud to stand here tonight, in the presence of so many exemplars of what is best in religion, statecraft, and responsible economics for all people, and to receive this Award. I thank God for Rabbi Schneier and his visionary courage that emerged from the Holocaust and the ashes of World War Two.

As leaders in our various fields of service to humanity, we all share a responsibility to ensure that the work of Rabbi Schneier continues with the same vigor and passion that he brings everyday. Our beloved Rabbi is not yet, as the Prophet Isaiah intimates, 'one hundred years young,'1 and his mission is needed, now more than ever.

We, who have gathered this evening, are his special consistory – those who stand with him, and around him, to support his vision.

I pledge here and now to always be at your side, dear and most respected Rabbi, and to lift up the work of the Appeal of Conscience Foundation, which serves the human family in ways that are being revealed day by day.

Our privilege is to stand with you.

Our joy is to bask in your wisdom and your record of service.

And our commitment is to always shine the light of your appeal to our better angels, that we lead lives of honest conscience and true faith.

Thank you all.

1Cf. Isaiah 65:20.

Photo: GOARCH/Brittainy Newman.

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