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Greek Dep. FM: Arrival of Holy Flame from Jerusalem under strict precautions

Greek Deputy Foreign Minister Kostas Vlassis this week spoke to the Orthodoxia News Agency about preparations underway in Athens to receive the Holy Flame from the Church of the Holy Sepulcher in Jerusalem, an annual and much-anticipated rite on the culmination of Easter Holy Week, and specifically on Great and Holy Saturday, which this year, however, has been drastically affected by restrictive measures to contain the coronavirus pandemic.

The **Church** calls this day the Blessed Sabbath, beginning with the Vespers in the morning, and with the sublime Liturgy of St. Basil the Great recited in the evening — the liturgical climax of the Church.

Vlassis said the Holy Flame, or Holy Light, will arrive in Greece from Israel aboard a special flight by Aegean Air. Once the plane is landed at the Eleftherios Venizelos International Airport of Athens, it will be received by the

Exarch of the **Holy Sepulchre** in Athens, Archimandrite Damianos and his assistant, the deputy minister said, adding:

“We are in constant contact with **Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis**, the **Jerusalem Patriarchate** and Israeli authorities for the necessary coordination. On the part of Israel, it has been made clear that this year’s ceremony at the Church of the Holy Sepulcher will, under no circumstances, entail the mass participation that we witnessed in the past.”

He also said contacts are continuing over the transport of the **Holy Flame** to various parts of Greece by scheduled commercial flights.

In a related development, Greek Education and Religious Affairs Minister Niki Kerameos on Wednesday reiterated that worshippers will not be allowed to attend Church services and Divine Liturgies, which will be held behind closed doors and with a minimum number of clerics officiating – per standing Covid-19 restrictions on non-essential movement.

The ban also includes the use of loudspeakers outside cathedrals where services are being conducted inside.

The restrictions are imposed for all places of worship of all faiths, confessions and dogmas in the east Mediterranean country.