

22/06/2023

Meeting of the Saint Irenaeus Joint Orthodox-Catholic Working Group



To the Participants in the Meeting of the Saint Irenaeus Joint Orthodox-Catholic Working Group

Balamand, 21-25 June 2023

In the name of the Holy Trinity, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit

Your Eminences

Reverend Fathers

Honorable Professors and all members of the Saint Irenaeus Joint Orthodox-Catholic Working Group

I wholeheartedly welcome you all to Balamand at the outset of your meeting that will be concluded at the St. John of Damascus Institute of Theology. It is a great joy to meet again with beloved fellows from the St. Irenaeus Working Group on the Balamandian hill, the jewel of the Patriarchate of Antioch. I take the opportunity to

showcase our previous collaboration for five years with this Group, as I was the co-president with Bishop Dr Gerhard Feige, during my ministry as the Metropolitan of the Antiochian Orthodox Archdiocese of Europe. I cherish the serious work and invaluable collaboration with you, conducted within an academic-free space of reflection and exchange of standpoints on various issues related to the Orthodox - Catholic bilateral dialogue.

Your gathering in Balamand marks the 19th Annual Meeting to re-read the well-known "Declaration of Balamand" that was written here 30 years ago. I was delighted to be present at the meeting along with the representative of the Patriarchate of Antioch in the bilateral dialogue at that time, His Eminence Metropolitan Georges Khodr. The details of the consultations and the agreement are still engraved in my memory, for I envisioned that it would be a step forward toward restoring unity.

In your search for unity during your Annual meeting this year in the Middle East, I hope that you will raise your voice, out of Christian love, as churches and individuals, against the exclusion of the people of the Middle East, against their deprivation of food, medicine, heating, and medical treatment. Sanctions and economic blockades, on the pretext of political disagreements, aggravate the suffering of our people and lead to the banning of Christians and their prayers and hymns from the land that Christ trod, and upon which the apostles preached! Again and again, we appeal for the revelation of the fate of the two Metropolitans of Aleppo, Paul and Youhanna, whose case has gone unnoticed by the international community for more than ten years! We notice with deep distress that the visible unity for which we have worked for a century is threatened anew by some who would exploit the suffering of our faithful flock in subjecting them to suffocating sanctions and blockades and by taking advantage of their vulnerable situation to proselytize them and detach them from their Apostolic Church.

On top of all the pain and suffering inflicted on the people of the Middle East, a devastating earthquake struck the region of Antioch, killing more than one hundred thousand and massively destroying houses, monuments and historical churches. I visited Antioch, Iskandarum, Mersin, Tarsus of St. Paul, and the surrounding villages to pray with the faithful during Holy Week and Pascha, to mourn with the afflicted and suffering parishioners, and to celebrate the feast of the Resurrection and hope with our children, who had this year a deep experience of the Cross and Resurrection. The accompanying delegation and myself were deeply touched by the way the people of these parishes manifested, by words and deeds, their unwavering faith in Christ, the God of life, proving that they truly are the descendants of those who were first called Christians in Antioch (Acts 11:26).

I welcome you again, beloved brothers and sisters, in the holy land of the Church of

Antioch. I wish you fruitful and enlightened consultations and convey to all of you the apostolic blessing, grace, and peace in the name of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ.

John X

Patriarch of Antioch and All the East

[Antioch Patriarchate سڤذوثرألا مورلل قرشملا رئاسو ةيكاطنأ ةيكريرطب](#)