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## **RESPECT FOR BOUNDARIES OF LOCAL CHURCHES AND DIALOGUE IS WAY OUT OF CURRENT CRISIS—ANTIOCHIAN AND SERBIAN PATRIARCHS**



The primates of the Antiochian and Serbian Orthodox Churches—His Beatitude Patriarch John X and His Holiness Patriarch Irinej—issued a joint statement on Friday, touching upon a number of crises that face the Orthodox Church today, including terrorism, the threat in Kosovo and Metohija, and the ongoing Ukrainian crisis.

The statement has been published on the Antiochian Patriarchate's Facebook page in Arabic and on the Serbian Church's website in Serbian.

The basis for preserving the unity of the Orthodox Church is to respect the traditional geographical boundaries of the various autocephalous Orthodox Churches, the primates write. As this respect has not been shown in the case of Ukraine, the Patriarchs call the autocephalous Churches to dialogue as a way out of the current crisis.

“The unity of the Orthodox world is a precious heritage that Jesus Christ Himself has committed to us, and it will remain preserved and clear, whatever the future crises bring,” Pat. John and Pat. Irinej affirm.

Pat. Irinej visited Syria and Lebanon at the invitation of Pat. John, where he was able to visit several communities, meet both presidents, and see the situation on the ground for himself.

At the end of his visit, the two primates issued a joint statement in which they appealed to the international community and governments of various countries to solve the real problem of terrorism and pressure on those living in the Middle East, including Christians.

The solution is neither to focus on protecting minorities, nor the supremacy of the majority, but the “synergy of all efforts within the framework of the principles of citizenship and one life for all religious and social groups,” the Patriarchs write.

They also expressed their grave concern for the kidnapped metropolitans Boulos (Paul) Yazigi of Aleppo of the Orthodox Church and Gregorios Youhanna Ibrahim of the Syriac Oriental church, who went missing in April 2013, and called on the international community to help preserve the sacred sites of Kosovo and Metohija, which are under attack by the local Albanian nationalists, and to consider any change in the status of Kosovo unacceptable.

Pat. John previously visited Serbia in October, during which the two primates signed a joint statement that touched on all the same issues as the new statement.

The Serbian Church has firmly rejected the so-called “Orthodox Church of Ukraine” as graceless schismatics, and the Antiochian Church has called on Patriarch Bartholomew to convene a pan-Orthodox council to resolve the crisis created by his invasion of Ukrainian Church territory, but Pat. Bartholomew directly refuses to do so.

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