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THE PATRIARCH OF JERUSALEM MEETS WITH POPE FRANCIS AND INITIATES CRUCIAL MEDIATION ON RUSSIAN-UKRAINIAN CONFLICT



Vatican City, September 29th, 2023

His Beatitude Theophilos III, Patriarch of Jerusalem, has taken a significant step towards fostering dialogue and reconciliation in the ongoing conflict between Russia and Ukraine. During his visit to the Vatican, attending the ceremony of celebrating the elevation of the Latin Patriarch of Jerusalem Pizzaballa to the Sacred College of Cardinals, Patriarch Theophilos met with Pope Francis, and extended the hand of goodwill from the Patriarchate of Jerusalem for Mediation to initiate a fresh dialogue aimed at ending suffering and promoting healing within the Orthodox family.

In his statement, Patriarch Theophilos emphasised the importance of Christian

unity, stating that the Rum Orthodox Patriarchate of Jerusalem, as the Mother of all the Churches, emphasises Christian unity and is deeply concerned about all the Churches worldwide. He acknowledged the profound impact of the Russian-Ukrainian conflict, not only on Orthodox Christians but on the entire global Christian community.

The initiative stems from the Patriarchate's rich history of reconciliation and peace efforts. It seeks to address the challenges posed by the deep divisions and wounds caused by the conflict. The Patriarchate is committed to the spiritual mission of dialogue and reconciliation, echoing Saint Paul's words: "Christ is our peace."

Expressing gratitude during the meeting, His Beatitude commended Patriarch Pizzaballa for his unwavering pastoral dedication to preserving the Christian presence in the region. He recognized the challenges facing Christians and Christian heritage in the Holy Land, particularly the rise of Israeli radical groups. Patriarch Theophilos pointed that these groups have been systematically undermining the legitimate "Status Quo" and the multi-ethnic, multi-cultural, and multi-religious nature of the region. "Hate crimes, illegal property acquisitions, vandalism of Christian sites, and mounting pressure pose significant threats" His Beatitude said.

The Patriarchate of Jerusalem is grateful for the support of His Majesty King Abdullah II of Jordan, Custodian of the holy places, of the efforts to preserve Jerusalem's Christian and Muslim character amidst these challenges.

His Beatitude ended his meeting with Pope Francis by emphasising that the journey towards dialogue and reconciliation is undoubtedly challenging, but the Patriarchate of Jerusalem stands ready to contribute in any way possible that may bring about an end to conflict and suffering.

His Beatitude's speech reads as follow:

"Your Holiness,

We bring you greetings from our fellow Heads of the Churches of the Holy Land and the blessing of the Holy Tomb of our Lord Jesus Christ.

We rejoice in the elevation of our brother Patriarch Pizzaballa to the Sacred College of Cardinals, and we assure you of the prayers and support of the Heads of the Churches of the Holy Land and of the Christian communities.

As the Custos of the Holy Land and now as Latin Patriarch, he has been steadfast in his pastoral zeal for the Christian presence in our region, and resolute in opposition to all those forces that seek to undermine the integrity of the Christian character of Jerusalem and the Holy Land.

As Your Holiness is well aware, we face deepening challenges and difficulties. While the majority of Jews, Christians, and Muslims in the Holy Land recognise the multi-ethnic, multi-cultural, and multi-religious reality of our region, in recent years we have seen the rise of Israeli radical groups that are working systematically to undermine the legitimate "Status Quo" and to reshape our common life. Hate crimes, the underhanded and illegal acquisition of historically Christian properties in strategic locations, vandalism and desecration of church buildings and holy places, and increasing pressure at various levels are evidence of the single greatest danger to our life that we face.

Patriarch Pizzaballa has been, and continues to be, a strong presence and voice in opposition to all this, and he has been responsible over the years in building trust and effective co-operation between our two Brotherhoods so that we may speak and act with a united voice.

We are united and steadfast in routing out this existential danger, and are encouraged by the multitude of support that we are experiencing in particular through the Hashemite Custodianship of the Holy Sites.

We are appreciative to you, Your Holiness, for your ongoing support of a vital and vibrant Christian presence in the Middle East. May God continue to bless you, and may God bless all the peoples of our beloved Holy Land.

As the Mother of all the Churches, the Rum Orthodox Patriarchate of Jerusalem has a special concern for the unity of Christians generally, and especially of the Orthodox Churches around the world. The ongoing conflict between Russia and Ukraine, and the threat of schism in the body of the Orthodox Church, are matters of deep pain and difficulty not just for Orthodox Christians, but for the entire Christian world and for all people of good will.

In our life and witness in the Holy Land, we seek continually for reconciliation and peace. We have come to understand over centuries that true dialogue is the only

way to effective reconciliation and lasting peace, and this has been our constant commitment.

It is in this spirit and mindfulness that we extend the hand and effort of the Patriarchate of Jerusalem to our sisters and brothers in Ukraine and Russia, to mediate and do all that we can to initiate a dialogue that may lead to an end to suffering and to a healing within the Orthodox family.

This work will not be easy. The divisions that have occurred over the decades are deep. The wounds of conflict will take time to heal. And trust, once broken, is hard to restore.

But the Patriarchate of Jerusalem, that was built upon the redeeming blood of Lord Jesus Christ, understands all this. Our life down the generations has been forged in the same crucible. We are strangers neither to conflict nor to the new life that is possible beyond it. As Saint Paul reminds us in the Letter to the Ephesians

Christ is our peace; in his flesh he has made both into one and has broken down the dividing wall, that is, the hostility between us...that he might create in himself one new humanity in place of the two, thus making peace, and might reconcile both to God in one body through the cross, thus putting to death that hostility through it (Eph. 14-16).

The journey in dialogue to reconciliation is our spiritual mission, and this is our wish for the Church and the peoples of Ukraine and of Russia. We stand ready to assist in any way that we can to help bring an end to conflict and suffering.”







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