Speech by His Beatitude Patriarch Theophilos at the award ceremony of the International Public Foundation for the Unity of Orthodox Christian Nations

On 21st November 2019, the 19th annual award ceremony of the Patriarch Alexy II Prizes of the International Public Foundation for the Unity of Orthodox Christian Nations for the year 2018 took place in Moscow. Among its laureates was His Beatitude Patriarch Theophilos III of Jerusalem. The text of the speech delivered by the Primate of the Church of Jerusalem is given below.

Your Holiness, Patriarch Kirill,

Mr. Valery Alexeyev, the esteemed President of the Foundation,

Your Eminences,

Your Graces,

Dear Fathers,

Dear Sisters and Brothers,

We bring you the blessings of the Holy City of Jerusalem and the grace of the Holy Tomb of our Lord Jesus Christ and the prayers and greetings of the Christian community of the Holy Lord Land.

The ties that bind the Russian Orthodox Church to the Church of Jerusalem, and Russia to the Holy Land, are profound and historic, and we would like to take this opportunity first of all to express our gratitude to you, Your Holiness, for the support that you always give to the vitality of the Christian presence in the Holy Land and the Middle East.

We also wish to express our gratitude to His Excellency, President Vladimir Putin, for his leadership and commitment to the Church in the Holy Land, and in particular for his crucial and generous assistance in the restoration of the Church of the Basilica of the Nativity. The Church of the Nativity is at the heart of the Christian world, and every week we welcome countless pilgrims, many of whom come from the whole Orthodox world.

We are honoured to be here today in this special gathering and feel humbled to be the recipients of the prestigious Patriarch Alexy II Prize, which recognizes those who commit themselves to working towards the unity of the Orthodox Church, and we accept this prize in humility on behalf of the Church of Jerusalem. For it is the mission of our Patriarchate, that is the Church of Jerusalem, which has been founded upon the redeeming blood of Christ, to be the focus of unity for the Orthodox faithful, and it is our vocation, as those to whom the *diakonia* of the Holy Sites has been entrusted by Divine Providence, to ensure that they remain places of religious devotion and worship that are accessible to all.

Throughout the centuries, the Patriarchate of Jerusalem has functioned to maintain our Orthodox unity in the Holy Land, often in the face of great challenges. And yet by Gods grace we have managed to ensure that the proper diversity, that characterizes the cultures and histories of our various autocephalous sister Churches, finds a deep and enduring unity in our common faith and in our sharing in the common Chalice of the Eucharistic synaxis. This finds its greatest expression when we celebrate the Divine Liturgy together in the Church of the Anastasis, where the Uncreated Light that shines from the Holy Tomb illumines and draws our hearts closer together.

It is in this eirenic spirit of the sacred mission of the Patriarchate of Jerusalem, as a guardian of our Orthodox unity, that we are compelled to express our deep concern about the present difficulties that mar the life of the Church, and about the imminent dangers we are in by our unfortunate divisions. In our world today, where so many live in situations of despair, and where the truth and light of the Orthodox faith is a beacon of hope, our unity is of profound importance not just to ourselves, but as a living *martyria* - witness – to the world.

As our Lord Jesus Christ himself prayed for his disciples:

"*Father...I ask...that they may all be one. As you, Father, are in me and I am in you, so that the world may believe that you have sent me. The glory that you have given them, so that they may be one, as we are one, I in them and you in me, that they may become completely one, so that the world may know that you have sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me*".

[John 17.20-23]

It is within this prayerful context and this eirenic spirit of fraternal love and concern that we present the following invitation. We would like to host, in our home as the Patriarchate of Jerusalem, our brothers, the Primates of the Orthodox Church, to gather in the spirit of fellowship - *koinonia* - so that counsel will be taken together for the preservation of our unity in Eucharistic communion. The unity of the Church in faith and life is a gift of the Holy Spirit, but it is our God-given responsibility - as those to whom the ministry of our Churches, being the mystical body of Christ, has been entrusted - to guard the unity of

the Church, even to the point of undergoing sacrifice. We have no choice before Cod but to commit every effort to defend our unity.

We take this opportunity, therefore, to declare open Our home in the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan, for hosting this "fraternal gathering in love" so that together we may be a witness to the Church and to the world of the unity of the Orthodox Church and our Orthodox faith.

In hosting this sacred gathering, in the capital of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan, we do so conscious of the role that His Majesty King Abdullah II continues to play as the Custodian of the Christian and Muslim Holy Sites in the Holy Land, and the commitment of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan in ensuring that Jordan remains a country where Christians pursue their religious worship without hindrance and where all are welcome.

Let us listen to the Godly inspired words of St James the Just, brother of the Lord and first Hierarch of the Church in Jerusalem:

"*Who is wise and understanding among you? Let him show by good conduct that his works are done in the meekness of wisdom. But if you have bitter envy and self-seeking in your hearts, do not boast and lie against the truth. This wisdom does not descend from above, but is earthly, sensual, demonic. For where envy and self-seeking exist, confusion and every evil thing are there. But the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, willing to yield, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality and without hypocrisy. Now the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace*"

[James 3.13]

In accenting this prestigious award, Your Holiness, dear brother in Christ, Patriarch Kirill, we receive it with this great hope that the unity of the Orthodox world, of which this prize is a symbol, may be lived out, among us all who serve in the "vineyard of our Lord", and that we maintain the common Chalice in unity and fraternal love in Christ.

Thank you.

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