Primates of the Antiochian and Serbian Orthodox Churches called Patriarch Bartholomew of Constantinople for dialogue with participation of heads of all Local Orthodox Churches

His Beatitude Patriarch John X of Antioch and His Holiness Patriarch Irinej of Serbia issued a Joint Statement after the irenic visit of the Primate of the Orthodox of Antioch to the Serbian Patriarchate on October 11-19, 2018.

The hierarchs underscored that the visit was made in the context of the difficult and painful circumstances that are facing the faithful of the Antiochian Orthodox Church in Syria, Lebanon and the Middle East, and the crisis that is currently facing the world-wide Orthodox Church, where developments are evolving rapidly and could lead to divisions in the Orthodox Church.

Discussed in the spirit of peace, love, trust and transparency were means to avoid deepening the rift and the requirements to consolidate consensus among Local Orthodox Churches. The discussions were based on true ecclesiastical principles which are distinct from unilateralism and approaches driven by certain interests.

On the basis of the similar experience of the Churches of Serbia and Antioch allowing to develop witness in the modern world, the Patriarchs noted the continuing efforts deployed by the Serbian Orthodox Church to preserve her historical, spiritual and national heritage, especially in the Kosovo Metochion, which is considered the historical homeland of the Serbian Church.

Having noted the suffering from killing, terrorism, forced displacement of population, and the various forms of political and societal instability in the Middle East countries, the heads of both Churches underscored that the faithful of the Patriarchate of Antioch have lived on this land for over 2000 years and are not a minority, but an indigenous component and integral part of the historical societal tissue of this region. Strongly underlined was the importance of supporting the Antiochian Orthodox Church in all it could help her in her salvivic mission in the Middle East. Open dialogue and peaceful coexistence, the equality of rights and respect of religious diversity were considered as the only possible solution to put a peaceful end to the conflict.

Both Churches made an appeal to the international community to pay attention to the fate of the two Aleppo bishops kidnapped five years ago and make every effort to release them and bring them back to

their flock.

The Serbian and Antiochian Churches regret that the dispute between the Patriarchates of Antioch and Jerusalem has not yet been resolved and has not been considered in a timely fashion by all the other Orthodox Churches.

The Serbian and Antiochian Churches express their great concern about the dangers of division and separation that threaten the Local Orthodox Churches in our present day. These are the result of unilateral decisions which are impacting the basis of consensus and of fraternal relations between these Churches.

The two Churches confirm that the strengthening of the unity of the Orthodox Church is a matter of great importance. This unity is expressed through conciliarity, consultations and decision-making processes based on the traditional canonical order of Orthodox Church and consensus between the Orthodox Churches. The important decisions, for instance, related to the granting of autocephaly, should be based on the principle of consensus.

It is also written in the statement that the dangerous situation in the Orthodox world, resulting from the situation in Ukraine cannot continue as it may bring about a lasting division in the Orthodox Church.

Therefore, and given the urgent need to avoid further escalation in the current crisis, the Serbian and Antiochian Patriarchs appeal to Patriarch Bartholomew of Constantinople to restore the fraternal dialogue with the Orthodox Church of Russia in order to, with the fraternal assistance and participation of all the other primates of the Local Orthodox Churches, resolve the conflict between the Patriarchates of Constantinople and Moscow.

An intention was expressed to make an irenic visit of Patriarch Irinej of Serbia to the canonical territory of the Patriarchate of Antioch.

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