Common Statement by His Beatitude John X, Patriarch of Antioch and all the East, and His Holiness Kirill, Patriarch of Moscow and All Russia

At the invitation of Patriarch of Moscow and All Russia Kirill, Patriarch of Antioch and all the East John X paid his official visit to the Russian Orthodox Church from January 25 to 30, 2014. The Patriarchate of Antioch is going now through difficult times because of the violence committed in its homeland and its tragic consequences of the political crisis for its people. This visit has given the two sister Churches the opportunity to discuss several disturbing issues affecting their witness and ministry. The two Churches feel the need to state the following:

1. The important mission of a Church in a society is to bear witness in word and deed to God's love for each person, regardless of his or her religious belief or national identity. Following the words of Christ "Blessed are peacemakers, for they will be called children of God (Mt. 5:9), we proclaim peace and respect for the human dignity and rights. Every human being is an object of Divine Compassion; it is because of God's love that the Incarnation took place and that the Holy Spirit continues to work in our midst. This basic principle inspires the two sister Churches in their actions, service and cooperation.

2. The developments in Syria today with their violence, killings and inhuman behavior are a source of sorrow for the faithful in the both Churches. We absolutely reject the ordeal of murder, displacement and kidnapping.

The two Churches believe that it is only through an open and honest dialogue that it is possible to guarantee a real peace in Syria, her independence and territorial integrity and to ensure equal rights and opportunities for her citizens. We appeal to the international community to intensify its efforts for the establishment of peace in Syria by supporting the ongoing process which has started in Geneva. A peaceful Syria in which national and religious diversity is respected will be an important factor in the peaceful process throughout the Middle East.

The two Churches also hope that all the political problems in Lebanon, Iraq and all the countries in the Middle East will be dealt with in a spirit of peace that rejects violence and all types of pressure that may come from extremist positions or terrorist acts.

We also stress that Christians of the Patriarchate of Antioch have been rooted in the Middle East for twenty centuries and they constitute an integral part of the local society as its full-fledged citizens. We

believe it extremely important to help create the conditions in which the Church of Ancient Antioch can successfully continue carrying out her saving ministry to her people.

This is also an occasion for the two Churches to declare once again the urgent need for effective actions to be taken for the immediate release of all persons kidnapped in Syria, in particular our two beloved brothers, Metropolitans Paul of Aleppo and John, the priests, nuns and orphans of the Convent in Maalula.

3. During the discussions which took place between the two Churches' representatives, it has become clear that there are many areas where cooperation between the two Churches will be very beneficial. One of these areas are immediate actions such as the humanitarian aid that was sent by the Russian people to their brothers and sisters in Syria as an expression of their love. Many other areas were also identified for strengthening relations between the faithful of the two Churches, such as theological education, pilgrimage and the exchange of delegations.

4. The two Churches agree that every effort has to be made to enhance Orthodox witness in the world today. Orthodoxy is called upon to bring to the world the richness of its spirituality in dealing with social and human issues and to make all mankind aware of the Joy that was brought by our Savior. To make this living witness effective the Orthodox unity is of great importance. This is why careful preparations for any meeting on the pan-Orthodox level through special committees attended by representatives of all the Orthodox Churches are a necessary condition for the success of such meetings. This will require the Orthodox Churches' joint work in a spirit of love and openness so that all the problems they encounter may be overcome

5. This visit was also an occasion to exchange ideas about inter-Christian communication. The two churches agreed that they should coordinate their efforts in order to advance in the right direction the process of dialogue for promoting the role of the Church in the modern world.

6. The Churches of Antioch and Russia both have an experience of co-existence with Islam. We reject any type of extremism and hate speech. We appeal to Christians and Muslims to work together for the benefit of their homelands.

7. In order to maintain their witness to the spirit of love that prevails between two Churches and to follow up the matters discussed a special committee has been set up in the course of this visit to plan the future actions to be implemented.

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