



## **Synod of the Antiochian Patriarchate: Ukrainian Orthodox Church faithful are persecuted by authorities for their faith**



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The Antiochian Patriarchate is praying for His Beatitude Metropolitan Onufry of Kiev and All Ukraine, Primate of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church, whose children are persecuted for their faith by the local authorities. This is **said** in a statement following the meeting of the Holy Synod of the Antiochian Orthodox Church, held on the 16-21 October 2023 in Balamand (Lebanon) under the chairmanship of His Beatitude Patriarch John X of Antioch and All the East.

After discussing the events taking place in the Orthodox world, members of the Synod also called on all Churches to unite and reconcile, emphasising that Orthodoxy transcends national differences and is called to proclaim the glory of God in His creation.

At the beginning of the meeting, the Holy Synod called for continued prayers for the leaders of the

Christian communities of Aleppo who **were abducted in April 2013** - Metropolitan Paul of Aleppo and Alexandretta, hierarch of the Antiochian Orthodox Church, and Metropolitan Gregory John of Aleppo (Syrian Church of the East) - and for continued loud reminders of what happened. The hierarchs also condemned the silence of international organisations on the subject, which has lasted for more than ten years, and called for the fate of the abducted hierarchs, whose example reveals the ongoing suffering of the suffering peoples of the East.

The Synod Fathers noted that there is now "an atmosphere of murderous hatred" over the lands of the East, emphasising: "In spite of the calamities that shake us, in spite of all the disappointment and despair, it is necessary to recall that God entrusted this land to men in order that they might transform it into an oasis of peace and not into a place of hell."

In connection with the tragic events currently taking place in Palestine, the Synod emphasised: "The Antiochian Church condemns the blockade imposed today against the Palestinian people and the Gaza Strip in particular, and strongly condemns the genocide committed there right before the eyes of the whole world. The violence taking place is the result of a violation of international norms and resolutions designed to promote justice." The Synod called on Antioch parishes to dedicate next Sunday to praying for justice and peace, and to collect aid to help the affected people.

Since the current circumstances call for increased prayer and co-operation, the Holy Synod of the Antiochian Orthodox Church decided to restore ecclesiastical communion with the Patriarchate of Jerusalem and to establish a commission to communicate with the brethren of the Jerusalem Church in order to find a solution to the ecclesiastical dispute over the jurisdiction of Qatar. The Synod also decided to send a church delegation to Amman "to express the love of the faithful of the Antiochian Church for the faithful of the Patriarchate of Jerusalem and to support them in these difficult momentous circumstances."

Members of the Synod of the Antiochian Church offered prayers for the stability of Syria and the cessation of acts of terrorism directed against it. They called for the lifting of the brutal economic blockade, stressing that the blockade is pushing Syrians to emigrate and creating a wave of displacement that is affecting neighbouring countries, especially Lebanon.

Prayers were also offered for stability and justice in Lebanon, and for the repose of those killed in the **2020 Beirut harbour bombing**.

"The Fathers pray for Iraq and for all the peoples of the region," the statement said. - "They call for giving priority to the spirit of dialogue in the region over the language of military confrontation, of which the inhabitants of this country are victims."

Synod members repeated their call for an end to wars and conflicts around the world, including in Ukraine. "The Fathers ask Jesus Christ, Lord of Peace and God of all comfort, to eradicate by His mercy the power of war and the savagery of evil, and to heal the wounds of those who suffer and mourn in this world, which yearns and longs for His sweet peace," the document said.

Decisions were also taken to glorify two Antioch martyrs: Priest Nicholas Hashi, martyred in Mersin in 1917, and his son, Priest Habib Hashi, martyred in Jabal al-Sheikh in 1948. The day of their commemoration will be 16 July, the anniversary of Martyr Habib's martyrdom. At the request of the Antiochian Archdiocese of North America, members of the Synod added to the calendar of the Antiochian Orthodox Church the day of commemoration of St Raphael (Hawawini), Bishop of Brooklyn. The Synod also blessed the second Sunday after the Feast of Holy Pentecost to be celebrated as the feast of the Saints of Antioch.

Turning to the theme of family values and noting the problems faced by families throughout the Antiochian Patriarchate's pastoral responsibility, especially those concerning children and young people, the archpastors called on all the faithful to adhere to faith and ethical principles as well as social values. They stressed that this protects the institution of the family from various manipulations and distortions, including what is disseminated in school programmes and in other ways "in the name of freedom and tolerance".

Other topics touched upon were the life of the Antiochian Church at home and abroad. Among the issues addressed were the filling of a number of vacant episcopal chairs and the election of new Patriarchal Vicar and Secretary of the Synod.

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