Statement by Heads and Representatives of the Local Orthodox Churches Assembled for the Celebration of the 1025th Anniversary of the Baptism of Russia

The Primates and representatives of the Local Orthodox Churches, who came to Moscow for the celebration of the 1025th anniversary of the Baptism of Russia, adopted the joint Statement. The main theme of the Statement is the situation of Christians in the Middle East. On 25 of July 2013, the Primates and representatives of the Local Orthodox Churches met with Russian President Vladimir Putin at the Kremlin. On behalf of all those present at the meeting, His Holiness Patriarch Kirill of Moscow and all Russia handed over the text of the Statement to Mr. Putin.

We, heads and representatives of the Local Orthodox Churches, who have come to Moscow on the occasion of the celebration of the 1025th anniversary of the Baptism of Russia at the invitation of Patriarch Kirill of Moscow and All Russia, consider it our duty to raise our voice in defense of our Christian brothers subjected to persecution for their faith in various parts of the world today.

Every day thousands of believers in Christ are being tortured and driven out of their native lands; many people meet their death.

News about tortures and murders are coming from Nigeria, Pakistan, Afghanistan, and India. In Kosovo, religious shrines are being defiled, many churches have been destroyed, and many people are deprived of the opportunity to visit the graves of their relatives and to pray to God in the land of their ancestors.

The situation in the Middle East causes deep concern. Many countries of this region are swept with a wave of violence and terror, with Christians falling victims to it. Libya, where there are almost no Christians left, is breaking into warring tribes. Terrorist acts go on in Iraq, where one tenth of the former one and a half million Christians has left. The situation in Egypt is getting more and more alarming as the conflict there has entered into another bloody phase and the Christian population flees the country in a mass exodus. Grief and sufferings have befallen families of thousands of ordinary people. As a rule, the first to suffer from unfolding conflicts are the most unprotected groups of the population including ethnic and religious minorities.

In September 2010, the first meeting of the Orthodox Primates of the Middle East region took place in Cyprus. The Primates expressed their deep concern over the situation in this region and the future of Christians in the area. The same concern was expressed at the similar meetings in Jordan in August

2011, in Constantinople in September 2011, and in Cyprus in March 2012. The statement in support of suffering Christians in the Middle East was adopted at the meeting of the heads and representatives of the Local Orthodox Churches, held in Moscow in November 2011.

The situation in Syria is particularly tragic today. In the heat of the fratricidal war, Christians, as well as representatives of other religious groups, are massacred, driven out of their native cities, towns and villages, out of the places where they used to live for centuries in peace with people of other religious traditions.

Paramilitary groups do not hesitate to use every possible means to achieve their goals. Their radical members carry it too far in their crimes. Horrific scenes of violence, public executions, humiliation against human dignity and violation of human rights have become habitual. Abductions and murders often committed for mercenary ends have become a common occurrence. Extremists do not stop at insulting religious leaders who have always enjoyed respect in the East.

The world mass media, as well as many politicians, are silent about the tragedy of Christians in the Middle East.

We express solidarity with His Beatitude Patriarch John X of Great Antioch and All the East who could not share our joy of celebrations today since he has to stay with his flock at the moment so difficult for them. Our prayers are with him and our brothers in Christ who *are being killed all day long* (Rom. 8:36).

We are grieving together with all the suffering people of Syria. We demand that the outstanding Christian hierarchs of Syria – Metropolitan Paul of Aleppo and Iskenderun and Syrian Jacobite Metropolitan Mar Gregory John Ibrahim of Aleppo be immediately freed.

We make this appeal to all the warring sides and those who can make a political impact on the situation: Stop the wave of violence and extermination of civilians! Impose a moratorium on the military hostilities so that a basis for peaceful settlement of civil conflicts could be worked out at the negotiation table! Free the captured clergy and other civilians!

As servants of the Almighty God, we ardently pray to the Author of Peace, the Lord Pantocrator that peace and love of brothers may be restored in the Middle East, refugees may come back to their settlements as soon as possible, the wounded may be healed and the innocent people who were killed may rest in peace. May the Lord inspire all those involved in the hostilities with wisdom and the good will to stop them!

The Statement was signed by:

His Beatitude Patriarch Theodore II of Alexandria and All Africa;

on behalf of the Patriarchate of Antioch – Metropolitan Antonio of Mexico, Venezuela, Central America and the Caribbean, head of the delegation;

His Beatitude Patriarch Theofilos III of the Holy City of Jerusalem and All Palestine;

His Holiness Patriarch Kirill of Moscow and All Russia;

His Holiness and Beatitude Catholicos-Patriarch Ilia II of All Georgia;

His Holiness Patriarch Irinej of Serbia;

on behalf of the Romanian Orthodox Church – Metropolitan Iosif of Western and Sourthern Europe, head of the delegation;

His Holiness Patriarch Neophyte of Bulgaria;

His Beatitude Archbishop Chrysostomos II of New Justiniana and All Cyprus;

on behalf of the Greek Orthodox Church - Metropolitan Prokopios of Philippi, Neapolis and Thasos, head of the delegation;

His Beatitude Metropolitan Sava of Warsaw and All Poland;

on behalf of the Orthodox Church of Czech Lands and Slovakia – Archbishop Rostislav of Prešov, head of the delegation;

His Beatitude Metropolitan Tikhon of All America and Canada.

Translation from Russian

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