

Joint Committee of Orthodox and Catholic Bishops Express Prayers
for Middle East Humanitarian Crisis

We, the members of the Joint Committee of Orthodox and Catholic Bishops, established in 1981, discussed the escalating humanitarian crisis in the Middle East during our meeting held on May 22-24. This blessed region is both the cradle of ancient civilizations and the sacred homeland of Christianity for over two millennia. Moreover, the peoples of these lands, each with their diverse ethnic and religious backgrounds, have by and large lived as good neighbors and with fraternal love and respect.

In concert with Pope Francis, Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew, Patriarch Kyrill of Moscow and all Russia, and Archbishop Ieronymos of Athens and all Greece, *we call the attention of the world to this grave humanitarian crisis and plead for its resolution. Aid must be assured to the afflicted people seeking safety in neighboring lands.*

The escalation of violence against Christians has recently been described by the US Congress as genocide. Along these lines, we remind the world that such acts of violence are not limited to Christians, but are experienced by the numerous vulnerable ethnic and religious communities in the region.

We call upon the international community to draw courage from the Gospel and serve as facilitators of reconciliation and peace by using diplomatic, humanitarian, and other peaceful means to reestablish the conditions for harmonious coexistence among people. This process should also encourage the safe return of those who were uprooted from their homes and forced into exile due to violence. We express our gratitude to those countries that have embraced the countless refugees and migrants during this time, and urge other countries to emulate their example.

Recognizing that human efforts alone cannot fully ensure the end of violence and the promotion of peace in the world, we encourage all people of faith to entreat the Lord God, Who is *not a God of disorder, but of Peace* (1 Cor. 14:33), to fill with His joy and peace those who are afflicted, as we continue to trust in Him (Rom 15:13).

St. Methodios Faith and Heritage Center
Contoocook, New Hampshire
May 22-24, 2016