



STATEMENT ON THE MIDDLE EAST

Blessed are the peacemakers (Matt. 5.9)

We, the members of the Assembly of Canonical Orthodox Bishops of the United States of America, gathered in Dallas, Texas, on September 16-18, 2014, prayed “for the peace of the whole world” (from the Divine Liturgy of St. John Chrysostom) and decried the brutal and bloody violence in the Middle East.

The barbarity perpetrated against Christians, Muslims and vulnerable communities in the Middle East by the self-named Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS) as well as other jihadist groups has claimed numerous innocent lives and driven countless people from their homes. It has also threatened the existence of Christian communities, which enjoy an uninterrupted presence there for over two thousand years. Recent hostility not only against Christians and Yazidis, but also against Muslims, has shocked the entire civilized world.

Echoing the statement of His Beatitude Patriarch John X of the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate of Antioch and All the East as well as the other Patriarchs of the East (August 14, 2014), we lament and denounce the egregious and barbarous incidents in the area, including religious intolerance and fanaticism, that erode the social fabric and unity of the region, destroying churches, shrines and monuments, which are the common heritage of all Christians and, indeed, all humanity.

Along with His All-Holiness Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew, “we cannot remain indifferent or silent before such irrational persecution, cultural intolerance and appalling loss of life, especially when caused by religious hatred and racial hostility” (August 13, 2014). The recent horrific events in Iraq and Syria, Libya and Egypt, and especially in Palestine and Lebanon, demonstrate the dire consequences of remaining complacent in the face of evil.

In this regard, we affirm the Message of the Primates of the Orthodox Autocephalous Churches (March 9, 2014), which called “for the immediate cessation of military action, liberation of captives, and establishment of peace in the region through dialogue,” stressing “that Christians in the Middle East are a leaven of peace” and emphasizing that “peace for all people also means peace for Christians.”

Therefore:

1) We affirm our solidarity with and pray for the safety of Christians in the Middle East, committing ourselves to work for peace and justice in the region.

2) We support international efforts to resolve the Israel-Palestine issue, ensuring the security, freedom and human rights of their peoples, and bringing peace to the Holy Land.

3) We encourage all people of good will to support agencies, already hard at work throughout the region, in their efforts to assist the displaced populations in order that they may return to their homes.

4) We urge governments and authorities to insist upon the fundamental human rights and religious freedom of all, urgently establish the rule of law, and immediately desist from supporting extremist groups and oppressive governments whether through financial means or military arms.

5) We urge the United Nations and the international community, and especially the government of our United States of America, to establish policies that promote peace and justice for all in the region, while refraining from all forms of violence.

6) We firmly reiterate our call for the immediate release of our brothers, the Greek Orthodox Metropolitan Paul Yazigi and the Syriac Orthodox Archbishop John Ibrahim, both of Aleppo in Syria, who were kidnapped on April 22, 2013, as well as the release of all innocent captives.

Finally, above and beyond our appeal and prayer for peace and justice, mindful that “what is impossible with men is possible with God” (Luke 18.27), we place our ultimate hope in “God, who is the source of peace” (Rom. 16.20).