

Press Conference Statement

His Beatitude Theophilos III Patriarch of Jerusalem, All Palestine and Jordan
Amman - 12 August 2017

Good afternoon.

We thank you all for coming to this press conference.

We are here today to deliver this message from the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan, under the leadership of His Majesty King Abdullah II, who, according to the Status Quo and international law, is the acknowledged custodian of both Islamic and Christian Holy Sites in Our beloved Holy Land.

Over the past weeks, Our Holy City of Jerusalem has been riding turbulent waves of developments that have thrown Our Patriarchate, along with all the other Churches and Christian communities of the Holy Land, into the rough seas of political tensions and agendas. The latest of which is the well-known decision in the “Jaffa Gate” case, that so crossed the lines of justice and reasonableness.

We have stood silent, bearing patient witness to a harsh campaign against Us and against Our Patriarchate, that seemed to grow in strength daily with false accusations and slander, targeting Our heritage and Our integrity. Today, it is Our call of duty and Our commitment, entrusted to Us by the Lord, that lead Us to break Our silence and say: Enough is Enough.

We are constrained to take this unprecedented action in calling this press conference to reject publicly and clearly the unfair ruling of the Israeli District Court in the “Jaffa Gate” case. This decade-long legal battle has resulted in an unjust decision which disregarded all of the Patriarchate’s clear and concrete legal evidence proving bad faith, bribery and conspiracy. Such a decision, in favour of the Settlor group *Ateret Cohanim*, can only be interpreted as politically motivated.

This bias decision, which affects not only the Patriarchate, but also strikes at the very heart of the Christian Quarter of the Old City, comes at an extremely delicate and sensitive time and will certainly have the most negative effect on the Christian presence in the Holy Land. It could well lead to escalated tension in our community that we are all working diligently to try and diffuse.

We shall be initiating an appeal process to the High Court of Justice, where we have confidence there will be a decision based purely on matters of law, procedure, and justice. The Patriarchate shall now embark on everything within its power so that this unjust ruling will be overturned.

Our concern about politicisation of the “Jaffa Gate” case is made more acute by the recent action of 40 members of the Knesset, who two weeks ago, signed a proposed bill for debate in the Israeli Parliament that would, if

passed, restrict severely the rights of the Churches to deal freely and independently with their lands and would threaten their confiscation.

This bill is a clear attempt to deprive Our 2,000-year-old Patriarchate, as well as Our fellow Churches present for centuries in the Holy Land, of our legitimate and historic freedom and independence. This intolerable bill, if passed, would be a clear violation of every international treaty that has governed the region, and would be an insupportable assault on the freedom of worship.

We are calling for an urgent meeting of the Heads of Churches of the Holy Land, to co-ordinate our opposition and response to these alarming and serious developments that will affect not only the indigenous Christian community of the Holy Land, but each and every Christian around the world for whom Jerusalem and the Holy Land are of the utmost spiritual significance.

We remain fully committed to upholding Our pastoral and spiritual mission as it has been entrusted to us by Divine Providence. Even as We face these unprecedented and shocking developments, We assure Our beloved Christian community in Our Holy Land as well as in our region of the Middle East, and abroad, that, as the Patriarchate of the Jerusalem, and the Brotherhood of the Holy Sepulchre, We shall remain true to our mission to be the guardians and the servants of the Holy Tomb of Christ and all the Holy Sites. We shall do all in Our power to uphold the status of the properties of the Patriarchate and our fellow Churches, and We shall be constant in the protection of the Christian presence in our region, against which, both, the judgement in the “Jaffa Gate” case, and, the proposed bill in the Knesset are such grievous assaults.

We cannot stress too highly the extreme seriousness of this situation.

We call upon President Trump, President Putin, King Abdullah II, President Abbas, President Rivlin, Prime Minister Tsipras, President Anastasiades, General Secretary Guterres, President Juncker, As well as all Our Brethren Heads of Churches in the world and upon the international community, to intervene to ensure that justice and freedom prevails in these matters.

Justice in this case benefits not just the Christian community here, but all the citizens of the Holy Land; so that all who call the Holy City of Jerusalem and the Holy Land their home may live in freedom and peace.

We pray to God Almighty to strengthen Us and Our brethren in these harsh and difficult times. May God crown our efforts with success, so that justice is done and peace is attained.

Thank you.