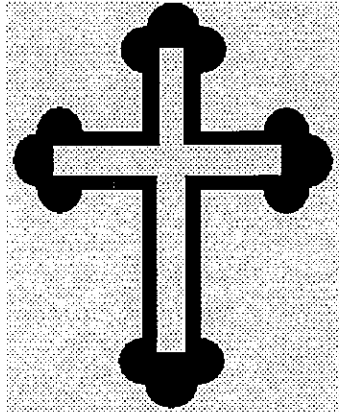




THE TENTH MEETING OF THE HEADS OF THE ORIENTAL ORTHODOX CHURCHES IN THE MIDDLE EAST

St. Ephrem Monastery, Ma'arat Saydnaya,
Damascus, Syria
April 19-21, 2007

COMMON DECLARATION

In the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit; Amen.

We, Pope Shenouda III, Pope of Alexandria and Patriarch of the See of St. Mark, Patriarch Mar Ignatius Zakka I, Patriarch of Antioch and all the East, and Catholicos Aram I, Catholicos of the Armenians of the Great House of Cilicia, give thanks to our Lord Jesus Christ for granting us, once again, the opportunity to pray and to reflect together on issues and challenges of common concern, at St. Ephrem Monastery, in Ma'arat Saydnaya, Damascus, Syria. This is the tenth time that we meet as Heads of Churches within the framework of the Fellowship that we have established in 1996. The Standing Committee that we have appointed has joined us.

In our meeting here in Ma'arat Saydnaya we reaffirmed our unity of faith that, for centuries, has been the basis of our common doctrinal position and theological teachings. Deeply rooted in the Holy Scriptures, the Apostolic Faith and Tradition, the three Ecumenical Councils (Nicea 325, Constantinople 381, and Ephesus 431) and the teachings of our Church Fathers, our unity has sustained the life and witness of the Churches of the Oriental Orthodox Family becoming a living source of spiritual strength and missionary engagement. For the Oriental Orthodox Churches the full communion and the visible unity of churches are based on the unity of faith which is manifested through Eucharistic communion and other Sacraments of the church.

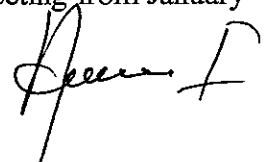
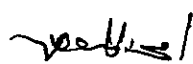
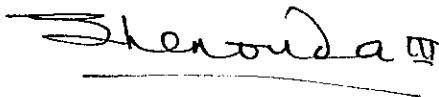
In our unity of faith we are not confined to the family of the Oriental Orthodox Churches; we feel also responsible to strive for the unity of all churches, both in our region and in different parts of the world. We consider the visible unity of church a priority. We remain firmly committed to the ecumenical movement both through the World Council of Churches, as a global ecumenical fellowship, and the Middle East Council of Churches, as a regional ecumenical fellowship. We will continue our active role in the World Council of Churches. We express our satisfaction for the adoption of the consensus decision making by the World Council of Churches. The Ninth General Assembly of the World Council of Churches has already conducted its business in Porto Allegre, Brazil, according to this procedure. We encourage the Permanent Committee on Consensus and Collaboration to continue the mandate of the Special Commission on Orthodox Participation in the World Council of Churches. We will also continue our active role in the Middle East Council of Churches, and we look forward with hope to the next General Assembly of the M.E.C.C. in Cyprus, November 26-30, 2007.

H.H. Pope Shenouda III and H.H. Patriarch Ignatius Zakka I extend their deep gratitude to H.H. Catholicos Aram I for his ecumenical commitment for so many years and his leadership in the World Council of Churches, especially as its moderator for the last fourteen years.

In our endeavor for the unity of the church, our Churches are engaged in a number of bilateral theological dialogues. We believe that these theological dialogues with the Eastern Orthodox, Roman Catholic, Anglican, Lutheran and Reformed Churches will further affirm the orthodoxy of the Christological teachings of the Oriental Orthodox Churches. Those theologians, who used to call us monophysite (single nature), have come to realize that we are miaphysite (one united nature), following the teachings of our common father St. Cyril of Alexandria. There still exist differences of doctrinal, ecclesiological, liturgical and ethical nature, which need more dialogue and discussion with other churches. We should keep in mind that the reception of the agreements of theological dialogues by the churches needs time and patience.

Concerning the Theological Dialogue between the Eastern Orthodox and the Oriental Orthodox Families, His Holiness the Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew I has commissioned the new co-president of the Joint Commission of the dialogue Metropolitan Emmanuel of France to meet Catholicos Aram I asking his assistance for the reactivation of this theological dialogue. Subsequently the two co-presidents of the Joint Commission, Metropolitan Emmanuel and Metropolitan Bishoy met at the Armenian Catholicosate of Cilicia, Antelias, Lebanon, on April 17, 2007 and discussed the future steps.

The International Joint Commission for Theological Dialogue between the Catholic Church and the Oriental Orthodox Churches held its fourth meeting from January



28 to February 3, 2007 in Rome. The fifth meeting of the Commission will take place at St. Ephrem Syrian Orthodox monastery, Ma'arat Saydnaya, Damascus, Syria, from January 27 to February 2, 2008, by the invitation of Patriarch Ignatius Zakka I.

The Archbishop of Canterbury H.G. Rowan Williams recently sent a delegation to visit us in Lebanon, Egypt and Syria to discuss the possibility of resuming the work of the Commission of Theological Dialogue between our Churches and the Anglican Communion. In order to be able to achieve this goal, we expect that the Archbishop of Canterbury hold an official meeting with Catholicos Aram I, who is in charge of the theological dialogues of our Fellowship. The purpose of this meeting will be to clarify the current situation in the Anglican Communion, share with the Archbishop the views and concerns of our three Churches, and discuss practical steps for the resumption of the dialogue.

We received through Catholicos Aram I an invitation from the Lutheran World Federation to strengthen relations with the Oriental Orthodox Churches and to establish an instrument for regular bilateral contacts. We welcome this invitation. We will convey this invitation also to the other Churches of our Family.

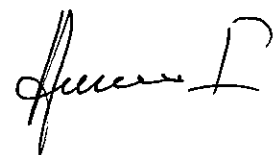
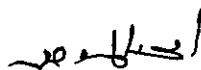
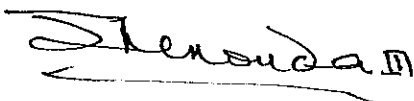
We are fully aware of the events surrounding us in our region. Our churches are called to work constantly for the just peace in the Middle East. The Christian-Muslim dialogue has been integral to the history, civilizations and cultures of the Middle East. Our churches in this region have been in existential dialogue with Islam. Due to emerging new situations and new developments taking place especially in Iraq and Palestine, continuous efforts must be made to deepen mutual respect and understanding between Muslim and Christian scholars and community leaders. Everybody has the right to explain and defend his or her religion without becoming aggressive and offensive towards the other religion. The same should apply to media which became a highly sensitive agent affecting the relations between cultures, religions and nations.

We condemn all forms and expressions of violence. Religion should be a promoter of love, hope and reconciliation, peace, justice and human rights. Religion cannot be exploited for non-religious purposes. We urge all those who, for one reason or other, use violence to resolve their problems. The problems must be resolved through dialogue, mutual understanding and mutual respect.

We focused our attention on Iraq which is exposed to the destructive activities of evil forces. This prevailing critical situation obliges a great numbers of people, both Muslims and Christians, to emigrate from their homeland. We encourage the United Nations (U.N.) and all the humanitarian organizations to support the suffering people of Iraq, wherever they are, till the Lord gives their country security and stability.

We believe that the peace process must continue with new impetus, and the Palestinian people must have its independent state and the right to return home. Israel must implement all Resolutions of the U.N. Security Council by withdrawing from the occupied Arab territories, including the Farms of Shabaa in South of Lebanon, Golan Heights and Jerusalem. Only full justice will bring about comprehensive, real and permanent peace in the Middle East.

We pray and hope that the Lebanese leaders may soon reach, through frank dialogue, to mutual understanding leading Lebanon to security, peace, and unity with the participation of all communities.



We greet the President of the Republic of Syria, His Excellency Dr. Bashar Al-Assad, the heads of all religious communities and the people of Syria. We noted with joy that the Christians in Syria are engaged in a renewal process: they are experiencing religious freedom; they are organizing church activities; they are building new churches and monasteries; and they are playing an active role in society and contributing to the progress of the country.

As we conclude our Tenth Meeting, we would like to express our thanks to His Holiness Patriarch Mar Ignatius Zakka I for his warm hospitality.

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Shenouda III

الحمد لله رب العالمين
والصلاة والسلام على سيدنا محمد وآله

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