



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

ARMENIAN CATHOLICOSATE OF CILICIA
ANTELIAS, LEBANON

October 17, 2003

COMMON DECLARATION

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

Greetings to you all with the spirit of Christian love and fellowship.

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 together and to reflect together on issues of common concern, at the Armenian Catholicosate of Cilicia, in Antelias, Lebanon. This is the sixth time that we come together as Heads of Churches, with the members of the Standing Committee we had appointed, within the framework of our fellowship that we initiated in 1998.

At our meeting here in Antelias, we have reaffirmed our unity of faith that, for centuries, has been the basis of our common doctrinal positions 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 and became a living source of spiritual strength and missionary engagement in the midst of the upheavals and vicissitudes of our respective histories. For the Oriental Orthodox Churches, the unity of faith is the basis of eucharistic inter-communion and the manifestation of the visible unity of the church.

The unity of the Church is a gift of God; it must be preserved and deepened. It is also a call and a responsibility; it must be responded to seriously. Hence, our unity of faith must acquire concrete manifestations and touch the life of our people through

common witness and joint engagement, particularly in the area of religious and moral education, theological formation and social diakonia.

Our unity of faith must also be shared by other churches, both in the Middle East and in different parts of the world. Indeed, the visible unity of the church is a common Christian goal. It is with this spirit and commitment that our Churches are actively engaged in bilateral theological dialogues and in ecumenical collaboration with many churches, world Communion and regional and global ecumenical structures. The World Council of Churches, as a global ecumenical fellowship, and the Middle East Council of Churches, as a regional ecumenical fellowship, are of particular importance for our Churches. We will continue our active ecumenical role in these ecumenical structures.

Besides the inter-church collaboration, we consider inter-religious relations and dialogue to be imperative. Being integral to the history, civilizations and cultures of the Middle East, our Churches have been in constant and existential dialogue with Islam. This dialogue of life, based on mutual understanding, trust and respect, must continue with renewed emphasis and broader perspectives, particularly on the level of the people.

The Coptic Orthodox, the Syrian Orthodox and the Armenian Orthodox Churches have played a significant role in all major initiatives, processes and actions in our region leading it to greater justice, peace and prosperity. We cannot remain aloof and indifferent in the face of the prevailing situation in the Middle East.

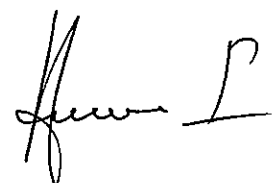
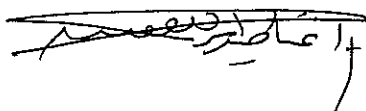
We believe that the peace process must be reactivated, and that the Palestinian people must have its independent state and the right to return to its homeland. Israel must implement all Resolutions of the U.N. Security Council by withdrawing from the occupied Arab and Palestinian territories, including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

Iraq must regain its independence, integrity and sovereignty. All occupying forces must soon leave Iraq and the nation-building process must start with the participation of all the communities in Iraq.

Our region is at a critical juncture of its history. We must be alert and exercise utmost responsibility in addressing the issues and concerns of the Middle East. We condemn all kinds of threats against the Arab countries and especially attacks on Lebanon and Syria.

We also condemn all forms and expressions of violence in our region and everywhere in the world. Religion, in its proper understanding, is a promoter of love and reconciliation, peace and justice. We urge all those who, for one reason or other, are in conflict to resolve their problems through dialogue and mutual understanding.

We warmly greet the President of the Republic of Lebanon, His Excellency General Emil Lahoud, the Heads of all communities and the people of Lebanon. We give thanks



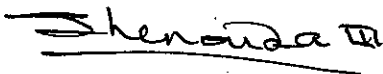
to God that, after a long period of destruction and conflict, Lebanon now is in a promising process of reconstruction and reconciliation. As Spiritual Heads we extend our full support to this process. Indeed, the Christian-Muslim co-existence constitutes the very identity of Lebanon.

As we conclude our Sixth Meeting in Antelias, we appeal to our Churches to remain faithful to the Gospel by living out its values and imperatives in their daily life, and by participating more actively in the life and witness of the church. Our collaboration must continue to give a renewed efficiency and vitality to the witness of our Churches, especially in its educational, moral, theological, diaconal, evangelistic and ecumenical aspects.

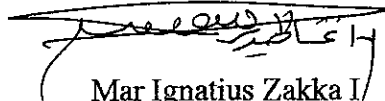
The family is a sacred institution established by our Lord Jesus Christ. The sacredness and integrity of Christian family must be preserved. Hence, we condemn all practices and behaviors related to marriage and sexual orientation that are not in accord with the biblical and moral teachings. In view of the emerging trends and challenges that jeopardize the credibility of Christian moral teachings and spiritual values and traditions, we appeal to our people to preserve their Christian identity and keep their faithfulness to the Gospel message.

We also appeal to our communities living in different parts of the world to remain firmly attached to their native lands by supporting all initiatives and actions that promote peace with justice in the Middle East, as well as mutual respect and understanding among religions and nations.

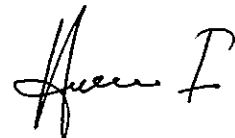
May the peace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all. Amen.



Shenouda III
Pope of Alexandria and
Patriarch of the See
of St. Mark



Mar Ignatius Zakka I
Patriarch of Antioch
and all the East



Aram I
Catholicos
of the Great
House of Cilicia