

HIS BEATITUDE AT THE SENATE OF THE DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF CONGO

On 25th October 2012 His Beatitude Theodoros II Pope and Patriarch of Alexandria and All Africa, accompanied by His Eminence Nikiphoros of Central Africa and His Grace Meletios Bishop of Katanga, visited the Senate of the Democratic Republic of Congo, where he was received heartily by His Excellency President Kengo Wandondo. He then address the Senate as follows:

“Your Excellencies the Senators of the Democratic Republic of the Congo,

Your invitation for me to address a greeting at the upper legislature of the largest country in Africa is a particular honour for me as well as for the Orthodox Patriarchate of Alexandria. And it is genuinely a particular privilege for the spiritual leader of Orthodoxy in Africa to address all of you who in wisdom and logic regulate the operation of the Congo, the heart of the African continent.

As a gift of love allow me to share with you the witness of my long missionary ministry. Both during my pastoral ministry in the Holy Metropolises of the Cameroon and of Zimbabwe, as well as during the past eight years of my Patriarchal tenure throughout Africa, I have been in daily contact with African people and their problems.

Day and night I co-ordinate the activities of our missionary areas in order that Christian love can become a fact, as it was taught two thousand years ago and incarnated by St Mark, the Patron Saint of our Patriarchate. I give precedence not only to the preaching and catechetical work, but also to the development of networks for philanthropic activities, among

those who have an enormous need, without any religious or other distinction.

This zealous activity is developing on two basic axes, the first being the provision of health and medical care. Our missionary crews establish hospitals, clinics, health centres, dispensaries. They dig wells to secure access to clean drinking water. They provide the local communities with vaccinations. They secure donations of feeding programmes. They hand out clothing and shoes. They are particularly concerned about the support of the sick and of those suffering from AIDS, as well as the support of their families.

The second axis of this diligent effort is the provision of education. Knowing that education is the driving force for the prosperity of the local communities, our missionary crews build and operate schools. They provide scholarships for needy pupils and students. They establish training centres for children with special needs, they maintain many orphanages. They also organize workshops to train women in various practical arts, so that they can in order to ensure their viability in societies where women are often the weak link.

The core of my thoughts, activity, hopes and dreams for the continent that I serve is man. Mankind as a personal existence, as a full and perfect image of God, over and above races, colour, boundaries, borders. My pastoral experience throughout Africa permits me to be fully aware that serving man with love expresses the will of God and the aim of the Church, which is nothing other than salvation.

This work is not easy. Missionary activity takes place in extreme weather conditions, on impassable paths, in turbulent political environments. However, for all of these sacrifices there is no grater moral gain than the moment when a smile blooms on the face of our African fellow humans; the moment when circumspection gives way to hope.

One such place of pleasure on the long and difficult road of contribution to our African fellow humans, is today's occasion. And this is because I have the unique opportunity to come into contact with all of you who tirelessly work for the progress and the prosperity of this great country; a country which although wounded by its colonial past, has the determination to refuse to get stuck in a deadlock; a country which with its united strength proceeds ahead having as its pointer sustainable development for the benefit of its citizens.

In conclusion, I call on you to allow your thoughts to travel and to think productively about a saying by the ancient Greek philosopher Aristotle, who wrote: "A thief is not one who takes something from you that he does not have, but the one who takes something so that you don't have it". And what mother Africa must not lose is the right to a better future; a future which its children will make productive through their initiatives, their imagination and their energy; a future whose fruits will reap children with no dependencies and guardianships; a future which will heal the injustices of the past. A companion in this historic challenge will uncompromisingly be the Orthodox Patriarchate of Alexandria and All Africa with the entire complement of its human potential. Thank you!"

His Beatitude then received at his hotel consecutive visits by Their Excellencies Messrs. Mwando Nsimba, Deputy President of Parliament as the representative of His Excellency Aubin Minaku, Maker Mwangu Famba the Minister of Education, Bonaventure Chelo Minister of Higher Education and Charles Naveji Mundele Minister of Social Welfare. During the meetings, His Beatitude thanked the high-ranking officials for the assistance shown by the state to the ecclesial Provinces of Central Africa and Katanga, and they all praised the contribution of the Orthodox Church to the country and committed themselves to contribute even more to the promotion

of its multifaceted work.