

HIS BEATITUDE AT THE 12th GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE MIDDLE EAST COUNCIL OF CHURCHES

On 16th May 2022 His Beatitude Theodoros II Pope and Patriarch of Alexandria and All Africa went to the Holy Monastery of Abba Bishoy in the Wadi El Natrun (Nitria) region of Egypt, to participate in the deliberations of the 12th General Assembly of the Middle East Council of Churches.

During the inaugural session of this Assembly under the general title "Take courage – it is I. Do not be afraid", His Beatitude spoke as follows:

"My dear Brothers in the Lord and Delegates,

With feelings of deepest emotion and indescribable joy we address today the 12th General Assembly of the Middle East Council of Churches convened in our hospitable Land of the Nile, after six years in the midst of a myriad troubles, accomplishing a feat and for this reason we cry out that Abraham saw the day of the Lord and rejoiced. Our gathering takes place during a very critical period during which the geopolitical confrontation between East and West, which leads not only to politics but also to religious confrontation, which stands like the open mouths of the beasts of the Revelation with an ominous prospect for our Christians. The spread of religious fundamentalism in our region, the unacceptable phenomena of extreme violence and terrorist polymorphism, lead to the tragic for us, uprooting of Christians from the lands of the Middle East. We all know this and we experience it. We are experiencing the phenomenon of the unfavorable demographic, to the detriment of Christians,

upheaval born of the uncertainty and insecurity of Christianity in the Middle East. They leave us because they can not find a fair and permanent solution to their problems.

We fully agree with the slogan of this year's assembly "Take courage – it is I. Do not be afraid" What do we Churches do to protect Christians, our members? The presence of our Christians in the sanctified lands of the Middle East must remain active based on strengthening and stimulating the fervent faith of the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ in their tried and tested life and the consolidation of their security. Only then will hope be born and as Paul, the Apostle of the Nations so definitively says, "Not only that, but knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not put us to shame".

We must fight, fight hand in hand all together to remove the causes that lead to the flight of our Christians from the Middle East from their original ancestral cradles to remain in their homes in conditions of justice and peace, strongly condemning the various conflicts and preventing the emergence, strengthening and continuation of religious fanaticism wherever it comes from and most especially from religious leaders. Promoting the universal right to religious freedom as the indisputable and supreme right of every human being.

For this, we need to continue and further develop dialogue with the other religions of the Middle East and especially with the strongly majority Muslim religion in order to consolidate accountability and peaceful coexistence, because our Christians are not strangers to the place, they are not foreigners, natives of this place for millennia. After all, our Christians are the bridge between West and East, Christianity and Islam, tradition and modernization. They live on the border of two worlds and two cultures, projecting as a proposal and way of life peaceful coexistence for everyone. We believe that the Christian presence is an important factor in

the post-conflict order of things beyond the fragmentation of political borders and divisions.

In order to achieve the above purpose and goal, we must work consciously to solve all the problems that exist and are unfortunately perpetuated in our region. If we fail "it is close, even at the doors" the "abomination of desolation", the severance of the Middle East from Christians. As religious leaders we must bow down and listen to the cries of anguish of our faithful for the human rights and religious freedoms that are so brutally violated in our time. We must take on roles and put our finger "in the print of the nails", participating in shaping the political future of the region.

Brothers and Delegates,

With these scattered and perhaps sorrowful thoughts we greet the work of our very hopeful 12th General Assembly, and we pray from our hearts that a light of hope will emanate from it, the light of the risen Christ; that the breath of Pentecost and the Spirit of redemptive love and living hope will breathe and be established amongst our Christians, who testify and witness to their very lengthy existence in the sanctified Middle East.

In closing, I express my warm thanks and brotherly love to the Blessed Patriarch of the Coptic Church, Tawadros II for the excellent hospitality, as well as to the fathers of the host monastery, this ancient ascetic palladium of Coptic Christianity as well as to the members of the General Secretariat of the Council and the Executive Committee of the present General Assembly.

Let us stand aright brothers and Delegates, Christ is Risen!"