

THE PATRIARCH OF ALEXANDRIA GIVES THE KEYNOTE ADDRESS TO THE PAN-AFRICAN PARLIAMENT

On Monday 5th October 2015, His Beatitude Theodoros II, Pope and Patriarch of Alexandria and All Africa, visited the premises of the Pan-African Parliament in Midrand, Johannesburg, South Africa, in acceptance of the invitation of the Pan African Parliament (PAP) and its President Mr. Roger Nkodo Dang, to make an official address to the opening plenary session of the new Parliamentary period.

His Excellency Mr. Dang, firstly welcomed to the Presidential Office His Beatitude the Patriarch and his entourage comprising His Eminence Damaskinos Metropolitan of Johannesburg and Pretoria, His Grace John Bishop of Mozambique (Liaison of the Inter-parliamentary Assembly on Orthodoxy), His Grace Neophytos Bishop of Nitria, the Exarch of the Patriarchate in Cyprus Reverend Father Athinodoros Papaevripiades, the Very Reverend Archimandrites Athanasios Akunda and Daniel Biazis, Preacher from Zakynthos as well as the Parliamentarian Mr. Andreas Michaelides, Head of the Inter-parliamentary representatives.

In his address the President welcomed the Patriarch to the Pan-African Parliament, in which 54 Parliaments from Africa participate. He stressed that he feels a particular honour that the patriarch accepted his invitation, because he represents the most ancient Christian institution of Africa. In conclusion, he invited His Beatitude to take action to organize a great meeting, under the auspices of the Pan-African Parliament, of all the religions in Africa, which will contribute to the dialogue between cultures and religious tolerance.

In his reply to the President, His Beatitude expressed his sincere gratitude for the invitation. He went on to speak warmly about the President and about Cameroon, where he served and briefed him about the general social and philanthropic efforts of the Alexandrian Church throughout Africa. He asked him also to contribute with his powers to the intensifying of these activities in other African countries too.

In addition the President emphasized that it is now the right time for both institutions to work together, on the foundations of philanthropy and that he will collaborate with him for the common good of Africa, while making special mention of the excellent cooperation of the Inter-Parliamentary Assembly on Orthodoxy with the Pan-African Parliament.

They both then went to the "Dr. Moussa Iddriss Ndele" Central Hall of Parliament, where Parliamentarians from the 54 African countries were waiting, together with Ministers, Diplomats and many official guests of the Parliament. His Beatitude was given the welcome of a Head of State. Having taken up his seat, the President called on His Beatitude to make his address.

His Beatitude stressed in his address that "I am here today, in the temple of African Democracy, to convey to the most important African organization where almost all the Nations of Africa meet, the Pan-African Council, our mutual anxieties for today, as well as our hopes for the future of the poor and orphaned children of Africa, and for as many of our brothers and sisters still suffering, who in spite of times and circumstances, remain faithful to the sacred institution of the family, so that all of us on the African Continent can experience a better future in social progress, prosperity, security and peaceful coexistence and cooperation".

He continued his address saying: "As Pope and Patriarch of Alexandria, in awe and in fear of God, I try to the best of my

abilities, to be helpful to the people of Africa, the ordinary people of toil, of disease and illiteracy, so that I can contribute as much as possible to the eradication of poverty and oppression and to the exploitation of man by man". "My presence here once again places me in front of the responsibilities which we all have, as political or religious leaders on our Continent, to strive even more vigorously to limit and eradicate these phenomena'.

Then, speaking of the important role played by the Inter-parliamentary Assembly for Orthodoxy, he said: "I therefore welcome with sincere joy and satisfaction, your cooperation with the Inter-Parliamentary Assembly for Orthodoxy. "Besides, all of us have been informed that for the first time this year, following the elections of 2014, by decision taken by the Plenary Session of the European Parliament, that a permanent standing interparty committee has been formed, for the freedom of religion, faith and religious tolerance". "We also learned with great satisfaction that the Inter-Parliamentary Assembly for Orthodoxy has substantially contributed to the creation of this Standing Committee and furthermore has close cooperation with it". "I believe that we also should move on to something more permanent which will be concerned with religions and will exceed good words and wishes".

In conclusion, the Primate said: "Our Patriarchate and I personally as Pope and Patriarch of the Great City of Alexandria, are ready to contribute to such a plan, such a perspective, for a permanent place for religious dialogue between the cultures within the framework of your parliament and your cooperation with the Inter-Parliamentary Assembly for Orthodoxy".

The President then made special mention of the person and the struggles of the Alexandrian Primate.

After the speeches, His Beatitude awarded His Excellency the

President with the highest honour of the Throne, the Great Cross of the Lion of the Apostle Mark, honouring in his person all the members of the Parliament.

The two leaders, His Excellency the President and His Beatitude the Patriarch, then went to the Parliamentary Mansion entrance, to welcome the Minister of Foreign Affairs of South Africa, Mrs. Maite Nkoana-Mashabane, representative of His Excellency the President of South Africa Mr. Jacob Zuma, with whom the Patriarch had a brief discussion.

They then entered the Great Meeting Hall, where the National Anthem of South Africa and the Hymn of the Pan-African Union were played, and the President declared the opening session closed.

Leaving the Hall, they went and inaugurated the Exhibition of the Inter-Parliamentary Assembly for Orthodoxy, entitled: "Pascha in the Orthodox World", which depicts many photographs from Christian celebrations of the Resurrection.

His Beatitude was then present at the President's customary media Interview together with Her Excellency the Minister.