

THE PATRIARCH OF ALEXANDRIA VISITS THE PRESIDENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF TUNISIA

His Beatitude Theodoros II, Pope and Patriarch of Alexandria and All Africa went to the presidential palace in Tunisia accompanied by the Metropolitans of Memphis and Carthage and the Ambassador of Greece Mrs. Anna Korka. His Beatitude was officially welcomed by the President of Tunisia, Mr. Moncef el Marzouki, with whom he discussed issues regarding the presence of Orthodox Christians in Africa, especially in Tunisia and its entire northern Islamic part. His Beatitude thanked him for the kindness with which the Christians in the country are hosted and protected and the President emphasized the peaceful disposition of the Tunisian people towards harmonious co-existence of all religions in the country. In conclusion the Patriarch awarded the highest honour of the Order of the Lion of Alexandria to the President for the assistance which is provided by the country to the Orthodox Church. The whole discussion took place in a very pleasant atmosphere together with the participation of those accompanying His Beatitude.

Following the meeting, His Beatitude made the following declaration to the Media:

We come as pilgrims from the Holy See of the Orthodox Patriarchate, which embraces the entire African continent with feelings of joy and exultation, to walk again in the historic places of Carthage and to relive memories of the glorious history of this heroic Tunisian people.

To visit the Orthodox Greeks, Russians, Serbs, Romanians, Ukrainians and Bulgarians, which under the spiritual and ecclesiastical responsibility of our Patriarchate, live and freely practice their faith in most beautiful Tunisia. In an

harmonious co-existence with our native brother and sister Muslims who here are a brilliant example of a peace-loving nation, for whom the companions of different religions and other cultural traditions are a guide to life and a way of survival in our difficult times.

The very honorary meeting with His Excellency the President of the Republic of Tunisia Mr. Moncef el Marzouki and members of the hard working and worthy government is a particular joy for us, as in them we saw the prospect of the success of the efforts of the Tunisian people for the creation of a democratic and modern country. The path to true Democracy will be long, but we are certain that with patience and the help of God Tunisia will win and its people will be the victors in the end.

We say this with the certainty of our historic teachings from a country, which wasl also recently plagued by multiple crises of the times, but which never bowed its head, a country which gave birth to and created Democracy, the country of Pericles, of Literature and Philosophy. The beautiful friend of yours, Greece.

We pray to the One and Great God to support all Tunisians I their efforts. And today, humbly and with our great love, as spiritual leader of the Orthodox Christians, we give a gift of love and honour in the person of His Excellency the President of the country, which goes out to all our beloved Tunisians. It is the highest award of honour of the Orthodox Church, as enormous gratitude for the love and kindness and the protection which is afforded to the faithful Orthodox Christians and to our Churches. For the intercultural relations and the tolerance and all those things which signify a truly peace loving and civilized Arabic nation.

Long live Tunisia. Long live Greece. Long live Peace.