



**THE ELEVENTH MEETING OF THE HEADS
OF THE ORIENTAL ORTHODOX CHURCHES
IN THE MIDDLE EAST**

St. Mark Cathedral, Coptic Orthodox Patriarchate, Abbassia
Cairo, Egypt
March 19-20, 2015

COMMON DECLARATION

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

We, Pope Tawadros II, Pope of Alexandria and Patriarch of the See of St. Mark, Patriarch Mar Ignatius Aphrem II, 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 the opportunity to pray and to reflect together on issues and challenges of common concern, at St. Mark Cathedral of the Coptic Orthodox Church, in Abbassia, Cairo, Egypt. This is the eleventh time that we officially meet as Heads of churches within the framework of the fellowship which was created in 1997.

We remember in prayer the passing away of the patriarchs of blessed memory His Holiness Pope Shenouda III and His Holiness Patriarch Mar Ignatius Zakka I, who together with His Holiness Aram I, may God grant him long life, have initiated this fellowship and its Standing Committee.

Congratulations were presented to His Holiness Pope Tawadros II and His Holiness Patriarch Mar Ignatius Aphrem II for their patriarchal enthronement.

The love of God, commitment to moral values, attachment to the homeland and living together with others with equal responsibilities and rights are basic Christian principles which should guide the life of our faithful. Christians as indigenous people of the Middle East, are integral and inseparable part of the region. Hence, preservation of their faith, culture, traditions, languages and holy places is highly important. We are deeply concerned about the Christian presence in the Middle East in light of the latest tragic developments in the region. Hundreds of thousands of Christians were uprooted from their homeland, particularly from Mosul, Nineveh Valley, Saddam, Khabour region and other places in Iraq and Syria; many faced violence,

Tawadros II

Ignatius

Aram I

persecution and death because of their faith; churches, monasteries, schools, community centers, houses, monuments and sites of cultural and religious value were destroyed; the international community was shocked at the martyrdom of the twenty-one innocent Egyptian Christian Copts who were decapitated on Libyan coast last February. We pray to Almighty God to strengthen the faith of our people and rest the souls of our martyrs in peace. We offer condolences to the families of our martyrs and to the churches.

The martyrs of true faith in Christ are indeed the martyrs of the universal church.

We express our deep concern about the kidnapping of Metropolitans of Aleppo Yuhanna Ibrahim and Boulos Yazigi, praying for their immediate release and asking the churches and the international community to continue exerting their efforts in this respect.

We congratulate the Coptic Orthodox Church for the declaration of Pope Kyrillos VI as saint by the Holy Synod in June 2013.

With great joy we were informed that during the patriarchal visit of His Holiness Mar Ignatius Aphrem II to India, a joint committee will be formed to restore peace and reconciliation in the Malankara Syrian Orthodox Church.

We were also informed with particular joy that by the invitation of the Coptic Orthodox Church a delegation representing the Holy Synod Eritrean Orthodox Tewahido Church will meet in Cairo to seek a solution regarding the house arrest of His Holiness Abune Antonios I, the third patriarch of the Eritrean Church.

We congratulate the Armenian Orthodox Church for holding joined Bishops' meetings of the two catholicosates.

We encourage the Subcommittees (Seminaries Committee, Publications Committee and Youth Committee) to continue, with renewed efforts, their activities.

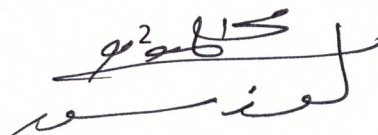
In our endeavor for the unity of the church, we encourage our Churches' engagement in a number of bilateral international theological official dialogues:

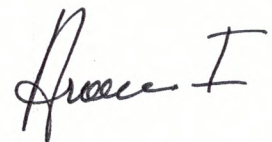
- a) *Dialogue with the Catholic Church.* The International Joint Commission for Theological Dialogue between the Catholic Church and the Oriental Orthodox Churches, held its twelfth meeting in Rome 24-31 January 2015. The Commission finalized its paper on "*The Exercise of Communion in the Life of the Early Church and Its Implications for our Search for Communion Today*", and submitted it to the authorities of their churches for consideration and action.
- b) *Dialogue with the Orthodox Church.* Invited by the two co-chairmen of the Joint Commission for the Official Theological Dialogue between the Orthodox Church and the Oriental Orthodox Churches, and with the gracious hospitality of the Ecumenical Patriarch His Holiness Bartholomew, a working group of official delegates met in Athens, Greece, 24-25 November 2014, to lay down a road map for the future work of the Joint Commission.
- c) *Dialogue with the Anglican Communion.* The Anglican-Oriental Orthodox International Commission held its third meeting from 13-17 October 2014, at St. Mark's Center, Cairo, Egypt. The Commission continued its discussion on Christology and Pneumatology.

We welcome the proposal for a unified and fixed Easter date and invite all churches to give serious consideration to this matter.

We were informed about the discussions and decisions of the last meeting of the Executive Committee of the Middle East Council of Churches in Jordan, 22-23 January, 2015. We fully support the mission of this Council in our region.







We encourage the *Faith and Order Commission of the World Council of Churches* to continue with its new structure the search for the visible unity of the church and its reflection on moral discernment.

We were informed about the next meeting of the *Permanent Committee for the Collaboration between the Oriental Orthodox Churches and the Orthodox Church with the United Bible Societies*, in Constantinople from 14-17 April, 2015, and we affirm the importance of this collaboration in our region.

We welcome the first meeting of His Holiness Pope Tawadros II with the Ecumenical Patriarch His Holiness Bartholomew, during the celebration of the golden jubilee of *Pro-Oriente Foundation*, on 6 November, 2014, in Vienna.

We explored the possibilities of organizing a meeting of the Oriental Orthodox Churches and the Orthodox Church in Alexandria in 2017, to discuss social and moral issues and concerns facing our churches.

We also invite the heads of the Churches in the Middle East in 2016, to discuss the vital importance of the Christian presence and witness in the region.

We acknowledge that the year 2015 is the centenary of the Armenian and the Syriac Genocide. His Holiness Karekin II and His Holiness Aram I will preside over the canonization ceremony of the one and a half million martyrs of the Armenian Genocide on 23 April 2015, in Holy Etchmiyadzin, Armenia. The heads of Oriental Orthodox Churches and representatives of churches will participate in this celebration.

We welcome the creation of the Egyptian Council of Churches in 2013.

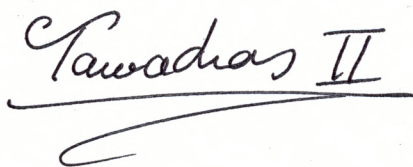
We congratulate Egypt and her president His Excellency Abd el Fattah el-Sissy for the great success of the Economical Summit and we pray for the prosperity and peace of Egypt.

As we conclude our Eleventh Meeting, we would like to express our warm thanks to His Holiness Pope Tawadros II for his warm hospitality.

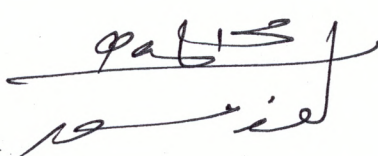
We extend our apostolic benedictions and pray for the peace in the Middle East and the whole world.

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Tawadros II
Pope of Alexandria and
Patriarch of the See
of St. Mark



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Aram I
Catholicos
of the Great House
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