



No. 412

His Excellency Mr Joseph Biden
President of the United States of America

Dear Mr. President,

"Seek peace and pursue it." (Psalm 34:14)
"Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God." (Matthew 5:9)

We write to Your Excellency as the Patriarch of Jerusalem, assured that our fellow Patriarchs and Heads of the Churches in the Holy Land – the cradle of Christianity where our Lord Jesus Christ walked upon the earth and spread his message of peace and justice – desire to convey with Us in one voice our views on the urgency to establish a lasting peace in the home of our faith. The political, economic, and social instability jeopardises the future of the Christian community in the Holy Land, the *"living stones"* (Luke 19:40), who long for peace, and who are often forced to seek opportunities outside, threatening the very fabric of our society.

The freedom for all people of faith to worship, which faces huge and growing challenges, must be protected, and attacks against the faithful and our clergy as well as the increasing vandalism and desecration of our churches and holy sites must be prevented. The current situation has become intolerable. The main route of pilgrimage to the Holy Sepulcher is under serious threat by the plans of Israeli radical groups who are targeting the Christian Quarter, including the main access points of the New Gate, the Jaffa Gate, and the Armenian Quarter. The purpose is to alter the historical, demographical and geographical features of the Holy City by groups that wish to expel the Christian presence from Jerusalem. It is also unfortunate that these groups are backed by certain far right segments of the Israeli political sphere and are together continuously attempting to change the long-standing Status Quo of Jerusalem and its' unique mosaic of multi-cultural and multi-faith character, blatantly ignoring all international efforts including the respected Hashemite Custodianship over Muslim and Christian holy sites.

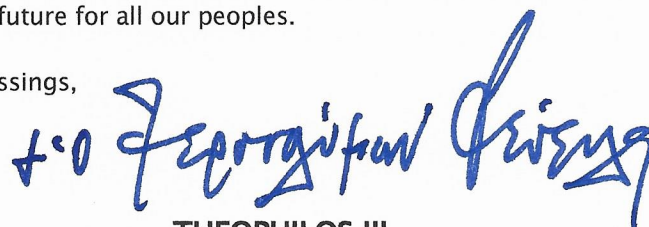
Mr. President, with your admirable leadership on the world stage, we ask you to seize this opportunity to do what others have failed to do. Peace in our region is possible. A solution that serves the freedom, security, and prosperity of all peoples is possible. Jews, Christians, and Muslims have a long history of living together peacefully and creatively in this region, and this can be our future too if together we can build bridges of peace and not walls of hatred.

The situation in Jerusalem and in the Holy Land deteriorates every day as tensions and challenges by radical groups mount. The situation here will not right itself, nor will delays make solutions easier to find and establish. We along with Our fellow Patriarchs and Heads of Churches stand united for justice and peace and are ready to work with Your Excellency and your Administration to do all that is necessary to find the solutions that must be found while there is still time to preserve the historic religious, cultural, and ethnic landscape of our beloved Holy Land. Only a peaceful and just resolution based on international legitimacy, that secures the rights of the three faiths and the two people of the Holy Land, will empower the ability to worship freely and enable all the children of God who call the Holy Land their home to thrive and continue to spread the message of peace, love, and respect of human life and dignity.

Mr. President, the Christian community here truly aspires to an inclusive Holy City of Jerusalem and an inclusive Holy Land. Real peace will start from the Holy Land and we are ready to be boldly courageous with our bridge building efforts. We very much hope that we the Heads of Churches may have the opportunity to meet with you during our next visit to Washington, DC.

May God bless Your Excellency, your beloved nation, the United States of America, and may He give us all the strength and determination to build a better future for all our peoples.

With Best Wishes and Patriarchal Blessings,



THEOPHILOS III

Patriarch of Jerusalem