Pastoral Letter of John X

The Patriarch John X

27 April 2013

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After the communiqué released on April 23rd, the Greek Orthodox Patriarch of Antioch John X, at the beginning of the Orthodox Holy Week, has issed the following Pastoral Letter, which is sent to "all the brethren, the shepherds of the holy Church of Antioch". We report it as a renewed sign of love for this Church, while we persevere in prayer for the two kinapped bishops.

Balamand, 27 April 2013

Pastoral Letter

My beloved children!

I address you today, at the end of Great Lent and the beginning of Holy Week, and at a time when we are being surrounded by much pain and suffering. Throughout our Antiochian lands, dangers threaten our homes, and political conflicts storm our countries. As a result, man's livelihood, dwelling, and even life are at risk. We are tried every day by death or abduction, and our latest plight is the recent kidnapping of our beloved brothers, Bishop Paul Yazigi, Greek Orthodox Metropolitan of Aleppo, Iskenderun and dependencies, and Bishop John Ibrahim, Syriac Orthodox Metropolitan of Aleppo, and the killing of the Deacon who was accompanying them.

I share the pain felt by a large number of believers in our Church as a result of these difficult circumstances. I strive with my brothers, the members of the Holy Synod, to lessen the impact of these conditions on our faithful and all citizens. This is an essential part of our Christian witness. We, however, refuse to accept what man is undergoing today. We are working in that our rejection of this situation reflects the tenets of our beliefs. We reject this situation and condemn it. Since we are the children of the resurrection, we are not afraid of whoever takes violence as a way to achieve his purpose. To be killed, or kidnapped, or to have our institutions destroyed, will not change our resolve to uphold our civil life and our coexistence; to cling to our homeland and to seek the reign of justice and rights in our homelands. Therefore, each and every one of us, whether in the Antiochian motherlands or abroad, is invited to express his concern and personal rejection of the recent course of events, aside from any political realignment. Humanity is the object of Christianity, for our Lord was incarnated for our salvation.

I take this opportunity to extend, on your behalf, in the motherlands and abroad, an appeal to the international community, urging it to do everything it can toward the release of hostages whose absence affects us deeply. The speedy closure of this issue is extremely important in order to avert the risk of terrible consequences that would follow. Our appeal also includes an urgent call for action in order to find a quick solution to the situation in our

beloved Syria; for the salvation of the people who are the descendants of an outstanding human civilization of thousands of years, and in order to prevent the risky consequences that could affect the entire region.

As we are entering the time of the holy passion and resurrection of our Lord, I invite you to reveal the unity of our Church who fervently gathers her flock in all that is right and just.

In this time, let us exceptionally intensify our prayers and supplications. Just as our Lord was not afraid to walk on the path of Calvary; in the same way we are invited to walk with Him along this path, being fully aware that by the Cross we shall conquer, because the Lord is risen from the dead and He will raise us with Him. Let us intensify our petitions as a living testimony, asking God to remove all injustice, praying for the quick return of our abducted hierarchs to their beloved ones, for the comfort of the bereaved, and for the deterrence of those people with cruel hearts, so that they may be inspired to refrain from harming their fellow human beings.

Therefore, I call on everyone, faithful and clergy, to approach Palm Sunday with a new spirit, remembering the passion of our Lord and connecting it with what we are living in today.

Let the Resurrection occur in every human heart, as the Lord has raised Lazarus from the dead. Let us work to have Christ triumphantly enter into the world's heart through our service and ministry, as He entered victoriously to Jerusalem […].

I urge you to pray throughout this Holy Week with a broken spirit, being aware that in our trials, we have God as our refuge. God will not overlook His little flock. May love, service, and courage be the gateway to the joy of the resurrection, a joy that cannot be taken away.

John X
Greek Orthodox Patriarch
of Antioch and All the East