

Statement Issued by the Holy Antiochian Synod

Balamand, October 18, 2022

The Holy Antiochian Synod, presided by His Beatitude Patriarch John X (Yazigi), held its thirteenth regular session and fourteenth extraordinary session, from October 12 to October 17, 2022, in Balamand, in the presence of Their Eminences, the Most Reverend Metropolitans:

Elias (Archdiocese of Beirut and dependencies); Elias (Archdiocese of Tyre, Sidon and dependencies); Damaskinos (Archdiocese of São Paulo and All Brazil); Saba (Archdiocese of Houran and Jabal Al-Arab); George (Archdiocese of Homs and dependencies); Silouan (Archdiocese of Jbeil and Batroun and dependencies); Basilios (Archdiocese of Akkar and dependencies); Ephrem (Archdiocese of Tripoli, Koura and dependencies); Ignatius (Archdiocese of France, Western and Southern Europe); Isaac (Archdiocese of Germany and Central Europe); Ghattas (Archdiocese of Baghdad, Kuwait, the Arab Peninsula and dependencies); Silouan (Archdiocese of the British Isles and Ireland); Antonios (Archdiocese of Zahleh, Baalbek and dependencies); Nicolas (Archdiocese of Hama and dependencies); Basilios (Archdiocese of Australia, New Zealand and the Philippines); Ignatius (Archdiocese of Mexico, Venezuela, Central America and the Caribbean Islands); Athanasius (Archdiocese of Lattakia and dependencies); Jacques (Archdiocese of Buenos Aires and All Argentina); Ephrem (Archdiocese of Aleppo, Alexandretta, and dependencies); and Nifon Saikali Metropolitan of Philippopolis and Representative of the Patriarch of Antioch to the Patriarch of Moscow. Also in attendance was His Grace Bishop Gregorios Khoury, Secretary of the Holy Synod.

His Eminence Metropolitan Sergio (Archdiocese of Santiago and Chile) apologized for not being able to attend. His Eminence Metropolitan Boulos Yazigi was also present in the prayers and invocations of the Synod Fathers, despite his physical absence caused by his abduction.

After invoking the Holy Spirit, and begging for divine mercy, the Synod Fathers examined the issue of the abducted metropolitans of Aleppo, Boulos Yazigi and Youhanna Ibrahim, and denounced the complete international silence over the issue, which is entering its tenth year. They called for their release and for an immediate

resolution of this outstanding case, a case which typifies the continuous suffering of the afflicted people of the East.

The Synod Fathers reviewed the situation of various Antiochian Archdioceses in the homeland and in the countries abroad. They studied issues related to the priest's livelihood and the priestly formation. His Beatitude gave a brief account of his recent pastoral and official visits, including his visit to the Archdiocese of Hama and the consecration of the Church of the Apostles Peter and Paul in Suqailabiyah, his visit to the Sultanate of Oman and the consecration of St. Arethas Bin Kaab Church in Muscat. He also spoke about his visit to Egypt to participate in the meetings of the General Assembly of the Middle East Council of Churches, his visit to Germany to participate in the General Assembly of the World Council of Churches in Karlsruhe, Germany, as well as his visit to Aleppo and the reopening of the ancient Theotokos Church and the old Archdiocese headquarters there. The Synod Fathers also addressed the subject of family life and emphasized the essential role of the family as "a little church." As a follow-up to the Synodal workshop that released the document entitled "Family, the Joy of Life" in October 2019, the Fathers emphasized that the temptations faced by family life today require from the priests and the believers in the homeland and abroad to intensify their efforts. The Fathers affirmed the practice of preserving the family by guiding young people, conducting marriage preparation programs, and giving spiritual care for married couples, for "unless the Lord builds the house, they labor in vain who build it" (Psalm 127: 1). Facing the difficult circumstances in our countries and the decline of human values in general, new initiatives taken by parish priests are vital to embrace the married couple and accompany them in their role as educators to their children. It is important for Priests to raise awareness of the parents' responsibilities as fathers and mothers. These initiatives are in response to the Lord's call to his servants: "Do you love Me? Tend My sheep" (John 21: 15). The Fathers looked into the relief efforts through which the Antiochian Church tries to stand by Her believers in these difficult circumstances. They commended the efforts made in that regard. The Fathers also addressed the work of the Spiritual Courts. They also spoke about the question of the transfer of priests from one Archdiocese to another, stressing the need to follow the known ecclesiastical principles in this regard. They also reviewed the list of eligible nominees for the episcopacy and approved it. The Fathers also approved the

creation of three Synodal committees as follows: Personal Status Law Committee, Bioethics Committee, and Holiness and Saints Committee.

His Beatitude informed the Synod Fathers of the recent developments occurring in the Antiochian Archdiocese of North America and the announcement by Metropolitan Joseph (Zehlaoui) of his retirement from his ministry in this Archdiocese. After looking into the latest facts about this matter and considering what is best for this blessed Archdiocese and for the wellbeing of its faithful, the Fathers accepted the retirement request of Metropolitan Joseph. They thanked him for his long service to the Church of Antioch and especially to the Archdiocese of North America. They decided to consider him Former Metropolitan of the Antiochian Archdiocese of North America, and no longer a member of the Holy Synod of Antioch. They also declared the vacancy of the Metropolitan See.

After declaring the vacancy of the Metropolitan See, His Beatitude will appoint a Patriarchal Vicar to oversee the administration of the Archdiocese until the completion of the procedures for filling this vacancy.

The Fathers accepted the retirement request of Bishop Basil (Essey) and his resignation from his ministry in the Archdiocese of North America. They also commended His Grace for his ecclesiastical ministry which he spent in the service of the See of Antioch and the Antiochian Archdiocese of North America.

The Fathers affirmed their embrace of the beloved faithful in the God-protected Archdiocese of North America and expressed their desire to strengthen fruitful cooperation with the various Archdiocesan organizations and believers. They emphasized their willingness to reinforce this cooperation and provide all necessary elements for the growth and success of the Antiochian witness throughout this Archdiocese, which is the pride and cherishment of the Antiochian See.

His Beatitude briefed the Synod Fathers on the disciplinary, administrative, and legal measures taken to address the crisis that affected the Archdiocese of Akkar, in Wadi al-Nasra, based on the conclusion reached by the ecclesiastical investigation and financial audit, conducted by a Synodal Committee. This Committee was formed by His Beatitude the Patriarch of Antioch for this purpose. These measures ended by transferring the funds in kind and real estate to the ownership of the Archdiocese of Akkar.

The Fathers gave thanks to God, expressing their joy for the return of the Orthodox Church in the Republic of North Macedonia to the eucharistic communion with the universal Orthodox Church. They also expressed their aspiration that the general Orthodox consensus about the name and legal status of this Church will be reached as soon as possible.

The Fathers elected Archimandrite Romanos (El-Hannat), Abbot of our Lady of Balamand Patriarchal Monastery, as Bishop of Seleucia and Patriarchal Vicar.

The Fathers call for the lifting of the unfair economic blockade imposed on Syria. It is a siege that targets first and foremost the Syrian people and is also affecting neighboring countries with migration and displacement. The Fathers call on the international community to make dialogue and concurrence among peoples prevail over the imposition of sieges that target citizens. The Fathers call to intensify efforts for working on political solutions in dealing with the Syrian crisis, which, while receding at this time, continues to burden the Syrian people with inflation, siege, displacement, and various living difficulties, even after this people have immensely suffered from various acts of terrorism, kidnapping, and wars. The Fathers emphasize the unity of the Syrian territory and the principles of citizenship and coexistence as a way to advance society and state.

The Fathers express their deep sorrow at the situation of their beloved Lebanon, which is the result of the destructive policies and the inability of the State to isolate the political conflict from its role in the exercise of governance. They appeal to those in power to put an end to this systematic corruption in the management of State resources and to stop adopting inappropriate policies. These policies increase the tragedies of the people and generate huge profits for those who control the fate of the country. The Fathers also call on those in power to expedite the provision of the necessary life services, to seek to alleviate people's living concerns at all levels, and to initiate the development of a rescue plan for the country instead of distracting themselves by trying to save their interests and ensure their continuation in power.

Facing the state's inaction and reluctance to carry out its duties, and in light of the economic hardship that afflicts most Lebanese people, the latter have become unable to secure the most basic necessities of life. Some of those afflicted are throwing themselves into death boats, to escape the hell of social insecurity. Thus, the Synod Fathers expressed their consolation to the families of the victims and appeal to

officials to open a reform workshop to draw up economic and social policies. They also call for the development of a plan that guarantees economic growth and eradicates the reservoirs of corruption and waste of public money. They thank all donors and charities that work to alleviate the suffering of the Lebanese people. They appreciate the relief and social work of all the Archdioceses, and they invite the faithful, especially those who are able, here and abroad, to increase their loving cooperation in alleviating the burdens of daily life on their brothers in need. The Fathers appeal to everyone to bring justice to the case of the Beirut Port explosion, a wound that has not healed for more than two years.

The Fathers express their strong rejection of a vacancy in the presidency of the Republic. They call on the deputies to shoulder their national responsibilities and complete their constitutional entitlement on time, and to elect a qualified President of the Republic capable of putting Lebanon on the path of reform, recovery, advancement, and the restoration of its leading role.

The Fathers addressed the situation in Palestine, whose central cause is being forgotten. They call on all countries of the world to implement the united nations' resolutions for the right of the people to return to their homeland and the guaranteeing of the right of the Palestinian people.

The Fathers pray for Iraq, and for the other countries in the region, and ask God to enlighten the minds of those who are responsible for the destinies of the people. They pray for them to sense the turmoil of the human beings living in these lands. These wars and conflicts are being paid for by the tears and blood of the suffering people.

The Fathers reflected upon the crises that are ravaging our world today as a result of conflicts between world powers, which are particularly heavy on the vulnerable in the land. They also pray for the poor people who are threatened only by their poor wellbeing and food security. In the midst of the conflicts the world is witnessing, they emphasized the role of the Church and its leaders in working towards reconciliation through the spread of the lovingkindness of Christ.

The Fathers followed with deep pain and great sadness the painful events in Ukraine that impact the whole world. They raised their fervent prayers for peace in Ukraine and the whole world, and for the Almighty Lord to inspire decision-makers to make

peace prevail and to adopt the language of dialogue in order to spare everyone further destruction along with human and material losses.

The Fathers send their greetings of love to the faithful of the Church of Antioch living in every place, praying with them, and raising supplications to the Lord of Divine providence, that He may embrace them with His divine help. The Fathers pray for the peace of the whole world and ask Christ Jesus, the Almighty Lord of peace and God of all comfort, to instill His peace in all, to touch the world with His love and Divine mercy, and to heal the wounds of those bereaved people living in a struggling world and yearning for His peace, glory to Him forever, Amen.