

GREETING MESSAGE

**ON THE PART OF HB IERONYMOS II, ARCHBISHOP OF ATHENS AND
ALL GREECE,**

TO THE INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE
ON “INTERNATIONAL RELIGIOUS FREEDOM AND PEACE”,
MOTHER SEE of HOLY ETCHMIADZIN
(September 8-12, 2021)

It is with feelings of joy, a sense of heightened responsibility, and intense interest that I turn my attention to your authoritative international meeting to address an optimistic greeting to the proceedings of this Conference, which is of particular value to our Christian Church, mankind, and the entire Ecumene. Thanks to the blessed initiative of our select brother, Patriarch Karekin the Catholicos, and the high-quality organisation of the event by his worthy associates under his guidance, we are offered a great opportunity to address such a crucial matter of universal interest in difficult times. I am certain that the presence of great speakers, their insightful contributions, and the constructive discussions will help shed more light on this multi-faceted issue and make the magnitude of the challenges the issue of religious freedom and its implications raise to the world community, along with the important matters of the value of preserving and protecting spiritual, cultural, and religious heritage.

Of course, such values, particularly in today’s crucial times, need to be reaffirmed in practice as a constructive response to modern conditions.

The inter-cultural and inter-religious aspect of alterity may be focused with a critical spirit on sincere and creative dialogue in order to address common problems such as poverty, religious violence, fanaticism, the preservation of peace, while promoting social cohesion and solidarity, always with love manifested in practice, communication and consensus vis-à-vis the other communities.

Besides, the Gospel constitutes both a historic product and a living witness to relations of cultural and religious diversity, apart from the exclusivity of a chosen people. Christ asserts that “*in my Father’s house are many mansions*” (John 14,2) and that “*and other sheep I have, which are not of this fold*” (John 10,16).

Acceptance of and respect for religious and cultural alterity is ultimately expressed as love towards the neighbour, and this fact is not merely a *desideratum* of today's post-modern social and cultural conditions but lies in the core of our theological Christian tradition.

The elimination of discrimination and the establishment of the unity of all human persons should of course be a goal for every religion over and beyond unfavourable divisive barriers which were raised through time in the historical course of each people and each religious community.

The Church of Greece and the God-loving Greek people perennially upheld and still uphold these Christian and ecumenical values, raising a voice of protest, whenever this was required by circumstances, with the developments concerning Artsakh as last example, where it was demonstrated in the most tragic manner what the violation of these values may bring us to.

What is therefore required of the international community is deep reflection, a realisation of its deficit in this field; what is required of us is thorough awareness of the facts we are called upon to manage, so that we may be able consistently to stand up to the mission entrusted to us by God, in our capacity as human persons bearing the Christian name and faculty with honour and a sense of heightened responsibility.

With these few thoughts accompanied by the blessing of our Lord, may I wish an abundance of grace upon this invaluable Conference and that the conclusions of its proceedings may fruitfully widen the study of these topical matters, by making them beneficial to every human person of good will.

With love in the Lord,

Archbishop Ieronymos II of Athens and all Greece