

Greek Orthodox Patriarchate of
Antioch and All the East

Syriac Orthodox Patriarchate of
Antioch and All the East

Eleven Years Since the Kidnapping of the Archbishops of Aleppo

Beloved Brethren and Spiritual Children,

Eleven years have passed since the calamity of Aleppo. Eleven years have passed, but this calamity did not turn into a mere memory and remembrance, since it is deeply present in us, in the heart of every Christian and Easterner.

Eleven years, and we still recall that moment today as an absence laced with bitterness, mixed with gall, spiced with Oriental myrrh, and mingled with the leaven of hope. Eleven years, and we still recall the kidnapping of our brothers Archbishops of Aleppo Youhanna Ibrahim and Boulos Yazigi on April 22, 2013.

Eleven years testify about a human tragedy that has targeted the Christian presence in the East. Eleven years since the kidnapping of two shepherds of one of the largest cities in the East. Eleven years and our Pascha is mixed with bitterness that has not been erased by days. We say this as we reflect on what has happened in the East, in terms of violations against human dignity. These violations are powered by markets of self-interest disguised under human dignity. The spear that wounded Christ's side is still wounding Him with the continuous migration of Christians from the East. However, this East has witnessed the birth, life, crucifixion, death, resurrection, and ascension of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the preaching of His holy apostles who traveled in all of its corners.

Despite all this, we hereby reemphasize that our Christian presence in these lands is part of a testimony we offer to our loving Christ. We have reciprocated His love to us by loving Him and being faithful Him, by preserving the faith we received from our mothers, taking up the Cross, and experiencing a renewed Resurrection in spite of every hardship.

Beloved,

In the midst of Great Lent and on the eve of glorious Pascha, we address you today in the hope that our message will be read on the coming Palm Sunday in all churches and parishes. It is a message from us addressed to the heart of each of you, and through you to all humanity. It is time for the tragedy of the two Archbishops to come to an end. In this Palm Sunday, we call out to Christ the Lord by the mouth of children and say Hosanna, meaning "save us."

Today we supplicate the Lord of salvation and the God of all comfort. It is time for this case to find closure, at least by unveiling the truth, no matter how sweet or bitter it may be.

We have emphasized, far from any archaic slogans, that we are from here, from this land, despite everything. No force in this universe will take us away from this land. The only force that enroots us in this East is the power of our reliance on Christ, the God who established us here in this East and implanted his gospel in our hearts through His apostles who baptized and chrismated our forefathers with the ointment of the heavenly Spirit.

In this East, our grandparents' forearms planted our wheat. In it, we also kneaded the wheat of our gratitude to God the Creator as an offering of praise and thanksgiving, and we squeezed the fruit of our vineyards to celebrate the presence of Christ in His sacraments. In this East, we built our churches and monasteries and hung our bells. From it, we set out and crossed the seas, and instilled in our people living abroad our love for a land from which we came and drew our identity and being. We have witnessed to Christ since the dawn of Christianity and continue to do so today. The case of the two Archbishops attests to this. Many wars have been taking place, but we persist in affirming that Christ's countenance will not vanish from this East as long as we, who were first called by His name in Antioch, have blood running in our veins.

We turn to Christ, the Lord and Bridegroom of our souls, with Whom we enter the way of the Passion, Crucifixion, and Resurrection, entreating Him to look with compassion upon the whole world, embrace us all with His divine consolation, remove by His Cross the agony of this East, and silence the noise of wars, that we may all enter into the light of His glorious Resurrection. May He be blessed forever. Amen.

Damascus, April 22, 2024.

John X
Patriarch of Antioch and All the East
for the Greek Orthodox Church

Mor Ignatius Aphrem II
Patriarch of Antioch and All the East
and Supreme Head of the Universal
Syriac Orthodox Church