



"My message today to the entire world is: stop the war in Syria and against Syria"

On January 1, 2015, His Beatitude John X, Patriarch of Antioch and all the East, offered a homily at Maryamiyya Cathedral for the start of the new year. ([Arabic original here.](#))

Brother hierarchs and beloved clergy,

“We are at the threshold of a new year. The newness does not lie in the year. The newness lies in our determination to transform time in favor of the truth, to give time a meaning other than the meaning that we know, for time to be an expression of the holiness of our life and our existence, for us to breathe into it the spirit of God’s grace that is within us, so that its eternity will return to it and it will reach the shores of our holiness. The newness does not lie in the year, but in our resolve to shape our being anew... Shaping our being means opening our arms to the poor and the vulnerable in the world, for us to be a force for ending their weakness and liberating them from their humiliation. Shaping our being makes us cream to sate the hungry, a coat to clothe the naked, a right hand to take the lame and guide them to good pastures.”
—The Homily of Patriarch Elias IV for the New Year, 1971

“For this the Lord has anointed Me to preach good tidings to the poor; He has sent Me to heal the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to those who are bound, to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord.’ This is the beginning of the preaching career of our Lord Jesus Christ. This is His program and His plan... These words are two thousand years old. These words are ancient but they ring in our ears as though they were spoken today. Christ spoke them two thousand years ago, recalling the wretched, the poor and the broken-hearted.” —The Homily of Patriarch Ignatius IV for the New Year, 1997

On this day the hearts of the faithful orient themselves to the Lord, the Creator, that He might grant peace to the world, the whole world. On this day, we approach the manger of Bethlehem asking the Child of Peace for peace for the world, for the Middle East, and for the entire world. On this day, we bow like Mary, who is honored by Muslims and Christians, we bow before the Child in the cave to sing with her and with the shepherds: Glory to God in the highest, peace on earth, goodwill among men!

Let us contemplate together the event of the Nativity. Let us imitate Mary. Let us raise with her a fervent prayer to her Son Jesus who sums up between His eyes God’s love for humankind and the hope of humankind for the mercies of the Trinity, a prayer for peace in the Middle East, where Christ was born.

My message today to the entire world is: stop the war in Syria and against Syria. We refuse for our youths to be fuel for the blind takfirism and extremism that we see, causing us to not believe that we are on Syrian soil. We refuse for our elders and our bishops to be a factor for exchange fluctuation on the dollar market. Today we want our voice to go out like fire unto the ends of the earth just as the voice of truth went out from Antioch to announce the Good News of peace to the inhabited world. Two thousand years ago, the Good News of peace went out from Antioch to the world and to Western civilization, which received the Gospel from the land of Antioch—a city which has a history and civilization, not destruction, a logic of hidden interests, and fanning its flames of civil strife with innocent people as fuel. Our blood is not less precious than the blood of anyone else. Our peace and our security is necessary for the entire world. God



did not condemn us, we the children of this Middle East, to be incense melted by the embers of a brutal war. Rather, He honored us to be a sweet incense of peace before the manger of Bethlehem, a kind-hearted incense received by the Lord of Peace in His Palestinian cradle, which carried His light and His Gospel into the world. We, the Christians of these lands, do not distinguish ourselves from anyone else, but rather we are all strings of one lyre which only knows the symphony of the nation which, if it stands with all its people and if, God forbid, it falls, it falls with all. We no longer understand why our children must be killed—and here I mean all Syrians—by foreigners. We no longer understand why we must keep silent about the kidnapping of our bishops and the kidnapping of all people. We Antiochian Christians are the twin of Syria, the twin of Lebanon, the twin of Iraq, of Jordan of Palestine and of all the Middle East. We have never been visitors by appointment or momentary guests. At the same time, we have never been enthusiasts of isolation but rather, a leaven of openness for all, a force for our nations in cooperation with all. We ask God and pray that He will lift this dark cloud from this country and return to it its peace. We ask Him to return those who have been kidnapped, including the bishops of Aleppo, Yuhanna and Paul, whose abduction the world has ignored: a mark of shame upon the brow of those who falsely and slanderously rally to human rights.

From this place we pray for Lebanon and Lebanon's stability. It is its right and the right of its people to be spared repercussions and calculations from abroad. Lebanon, which has tasted the bitterness of civil war, has the right to enjoy peace and the protection of the state. We understand how external calculations have impacted Lebanon. However, we are convinced that the unity of Lebanon in general and of Christians in particular will be able to bring the right person to the presidency without having to kick the ball, as per usual, into the court of regional balances and other considerations. Lebanon has the right to be a country of peace, not a hotbed of kidnapping and it also has the right—indeed, it is one of its characteristics—to be a country of coexistence within a single state.

Our prayer today is for Palestine and for Palestine's neighbors. Our prayer is for the cradle of Christ, for Jordan, for Egypt, for Iraq. Our prayer is for all the Middle East and the world.

At the beginning of the new year, I send my greetings to Dr. Bashar al-Assad, president of the Syrian Arab Republic and to the Syrian people, asking God to remove this dark cloud from Syria.

I likewise send Nativity greetings to Lebanon and all Lebanese, asking the Lord of heaven to sustain His peace and His mercy upon Lebanon, the Middle East and the entire world.

I send my apostolic blessing to our children at home and abroad, and I ask the mighty Lord to have mercy on the souls of our martyrs, and to console those whose hearts have been affected by the hardness of this present age.

We pray to You O Jesus at the beginning of the new year to sanctify our days by Your presence and to visit our baseness with Your mercy. We implore You, Master of the rhythm of our time, to place Your consolation in our hearts. From the meekness of Your eyes we draw strength and from the humility of Your manger we receive the power of hope. Be everything to everyone and fill our life with the breath of Your holiness that we may sing to you:

“Glory to God in the highest and on earth the peace that Your presence has provided us, O Savior, glory to You!”