

Statement by Patriarch Gregorios III

after terrorist explosions in Damascus' Mazraa district
left a toll of 53 dead and 235 injured
and caused extensive damage, particularly to a school and a hospital

21 February 2013

Three successive explosions shook Damascus, lacerating us heart and soul, injuring our feelings and bringing tears to our eyes. We cried aloud in prayers and supplications, like the father of the sick child calling out to the Lord Jesus Christ, "If thou canst do anything, have compassion on us, and help us!" (Mark 9: 22)

We pray for the repose of the souls of the victims, dear citizens and beloved children of Syria: civilians, students, children, all innocent citizens. We pray for the injured to be made well soon and for those who mourn to be comforted.

We make a heartfelt appeal to the conscience of everyone worldwide, to heads of State, especially of Arab countries, leaders of institutions and international assemblies, peace activists, His Holiness the Pope and Christian bishops everywhere, imploring them to hear our cry and the sufferings and pain of the Syrian people. No-one has the right to make excuses and deny responsibility for the massacre, destruction, explosions, riots, nor for the current crisis, hatred, rancour and enmity between the children of the same homeland.

We renew our appeal to the whole world to end the influx of weapons to Syria. We ask the international community and the world's more powerful countries to support Syria in its efforts to implement the way of dialogue and reach a diplomatic solution to the crisis.

For our part, we support the efforts for dialogue. This is the programme of Syria's government and people and it also chimes in with our heritage and convictions. We implore peace activists and Nobel Peace Prize laureates to join Syria's plan for dialogue and reconciliation.

By reason of our responsibility as Patriarch, we turn to the Security Council, the European Union, and all nations, especially friendly countries, and to the many lay and religious friends we have in Western Europe (particularly in Austria, France, Germany, Great Britain and Italy). We ask the latter to undertake serious, timely efforts to lobby their governments in support of a political solution and dialogue among Syrians, and to forestall the arming of belligerents.

We extend our appeal to Russia and the United States of America to continue their sincere efforts to support progress towards dialogue and a comprehensive political solution. The patience of Syrians is exhausted: their suffering is exacerbated in every detail of their daily life.

We ask His Holiness the Pope and leaders of the Holy Apostolic See of Rome to launch a diplomatic initiative of the Catholic Church based on its global spiritual influence.

We turn once more especially to our faithful of the Patriarchal Eparchy of Damascus, inviting them to fast and pray during this period of Great Lent for security and peace in Syria and for the success of efforts for dialogue and reconciliation.

We implore our Lord Jesus Christ, fervently and insistently, for an end to this suffocating crisis, and for our fellow-citizens' painful way of the cross to lead in the end to resurrection joy, at the intercession of the Mother of God and Ever-Virgin Mary, Queen of Peace.

During his visit to Lebanon in September 2012, Pope Benedict XVI expressed his sorrow for the sufferings of the inhabitants of “this region which seems to endure interminable birth pangs... Why did God choose these lands? Why is their life so turbulent? God chose these lands, I think, to be an example, to bear witness before the world that every man and woman has the possibility of concretely realizing his or her longing for peace and reconciliation!...

“Thoughts of peace, words of peace and acts of peace create an atmosphere of respect, honesty and cordiality, where faults and offences can be truthfully acknowledged as a means of advancing together on the path of reconciliation. May political and religious leaders reflect on this!...

“It involves rejecting revenge, acknowledging one’s faults, accepting apologies without demanding them, and, not least, forgiveness. Only forgiveness, given and received, can lay lasting foundations for reconciliation and universal peace.” (*Address of Pope Benedict XVI, Hall of the Baabda Presidential Palace, Saturday, 15 September 2012*)

+ Gregorios III

Patriarch of Antioch and all the East,
Of Alexandria and of Jerusalem