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ECUMENICAL PATRIARCHATE

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† **BARTHOLOMEW**

By the Mercy of God Archbishop of Constantinople-New Rome

And Ecumenical Patriarch

To the Plenitude of the Church

Grace, Mercy and Peace

From the Saviour Christ Born in Bethlehem

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“Christ is born, glorify Him; Christ is on earth, exalt Him.”

Let us rejoice in gladness for the ineffable condescension of God. The angels precede us singing: *“Glory to God in the highest and on earth peace, good will among all people.”*

Yet, on earth we behold and experience wars and threats of wars. Still, the joyful announcement is in no way annulled. Peace has truly come to earth through reconciliation between God and people in the person of Jesus Christ. Unfortunately, however, we human beings have not been reconciled, despite God’s sacred will. We retain a hateful disposition for one another. We discriminate against one another by means of fanaticism with regard to religious and political convictions, by means of greed in the acquisition of material goods, and through expansionism in the exercise of political power. These are the reasons why we come into conflict with one another.

With his Decree of Milan issued in 313AD, the enlightened Roman emperor, St. Constantine the Great, instituted freedom in the practice of the Christian faith, alongside freedom in the practice of every other religion. Sadly, with the passing since then of

precisely 1700 years, we continue to see religious persecution against Christians and other Christian minorities in various places.

Moreover, economic competition is spreading globally, as is the pursuit of ephemeral profit, which is promoted as a principal target. The gloomy consequences of the over-concentration of wealth in the hands of the few and the financial desolation of the vast human masses are ignored. This disproportion, which is described worldwide as *a financial crisis*, is essentially the product of *a moral crisis*. Nevertheless, humankind is regrettably not attributing the proper significance to this moral crisis. In order to justify this indifference, people invoke the notion of free trade. But free trade is not a license for crime. And criminal conduct is far more than what is recorded in penal codes. It includes what cannot be foreseen by the prescription of statutory laws, such as the confiscation of people's wealth by supposedly legitimate means. Inasmuch, therefore, as the law cannot be formally imposed, the actions of a minority of citizens are often expressed in an unrestrained manner, provoking disruption in social justice and peace.

From the Ecumenical Patriarchate, then, we have been closely following the “signs of the times,” which everywhere echo the “sounds” of “war and turmoil” – with “nation rising against nation, dominion against dominion, great earthquakes, and in various places famines and plagues, alongside dreadful phenomena and heavenly portents.” (Luke 21.10-12) In many ways, we are experiencing what St. Basil wrote about “the two types of love: one is feeling sorrow and concern upon seeing one's beloved harmed; the other is rejoicing and striving to benefit one's beloved. Anyone who demonstrates neither of these categories clearly does not love one's brother or sister. (Basil the Great, *Shorter Rules*, PG31.1200A) This is why, from this sacred See and Center of Orthodoxy, we proclaim the impending new year as the *Year of Global Solidarity*.

It is our hope that in this way we may be able to sensitize sufficient hearts among humankind regarding the immense and extensive problem of poverty and the need to assume the necessary measures to comfort the hungry and misfortunate.

As your spiritual father and church leader, we ask for the support of all persons and governments of good will in order that we may realize the Lord's *peace on earth* – the peace announced by the angels and granted by the infant Jesus. If we truly desire this peace, which transcends all understanding, we are obliged to pursue it palpably instead of being indifferent to the spiritual and material vulnerability of our brothers and sisters, for whom Christ was born.

Love and peace are the essential features of the Lord's disciples and of every Christian. So let us encourage one another during this *Year of Global Solidarity* to make every conscious effort – as individuals and nations – for the reduction of the inhumane consequences created by the vast inequalities as well as the recognition by all people of the rights of the weakest among us in order that everyone may enjoy the essential goods necessary for human life. Thus, we shall indeed witness – at least to the degree that it is humanly possible – the realization of peace on earth.

Together with all of material and spiritual creation, we venerate the Nativity of the Son and Word of God from the Virgin Mary, bowing down before the newborn Jesus – our illumination and salvation, our advocate in life – and wondering like the Psalmist “Whom shall we fear? Of whom shall we be afraid?” (Ps. 26.1) as Christians, since “to us is born today a saviour” (Luke 2.11), “the Lord of hosts, the king of glory.” (Ps. 23.10)

We hope earnestly and pray fervently that the dawning 2013 will be for everyone a year of global solidarity, freedom, reconciliation, good will, peace and joy. May the pre-eternal Word of the Father, who was born in a manger, who united angels and human beings into one order, establishing peace on earth, grant to all people patience, hope and strength, while blessing the world with the divine gifts of His love. Amen.

At the Phanar, Christmas 2012

Your fervent supplicant before God

†**Bartholomew of Constantinople**