

Welcome Message

Tuesday 17-December-2013

In the Name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit Amen.

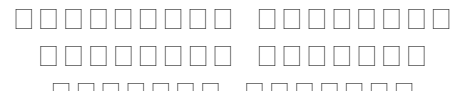
Your Royal Highness Prince Charles, Prince of Wales,
Your Royal Highness Prince Ghazi bin Mohammed of Jordan,
Your Serene Highness
Your Excellency
My Lord Bishop
Reverend Fathers
Distinguished Guests
Ladies and Gentlemen
Dear Friends

On this auspicious occasion and in the name of our Patriarch His Holiness Moran Mor Ignatius Zakka I Iwas, I would like as Archbishop and on behalf of the Syriac community to welcome you all today to our small Cathedral of St Thomas The Apostle and greet you all in Syriac Aramaic.

Today's visit by The Prince of Wales and his distinguished guests is undoubtedly a powerful symbol of the love, respect and care which Your Royal Highness and the British Monarchy hold for the numerous religious communities living in the United Kingdom today.

We greatly value this Royal Visit as it coincides with the forthcoming celebration of the birth of our Lord Jesus Christ and the New Year - a time when people traditionally exchange greetings and good will to each other.

Your Royal Highness's visit today is also a signal of your solidarity for those of us who are originally from the Middle East but who witness the daily humiliation of many within our community who are kidnapped, killed, displaced and forced to flee their homelands in many cases because of our faith.



Many fled to the safety of the West seeking that essential universal and God given right to peace, security and stability and the right to practice ones faith without fear of persecution.

In light of this we would like today to publicly express our sincere thanks to Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth the Second, Her Majesty's Government and above all the British people who have welcomed us and offered us their centuries old generosity of spirit and hospitality. This is something none of us will ever forget.

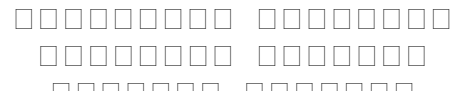
In the East, Christians, Muslims, Jews and others have lived together for centuries. We used to live in peace together as brothers and help each other. However today militant Islamic groups have appeared. Those groups are not just against Christians but also against Muslims as well. They are distorting Islam and its moderate teachings. For Christians we have suffered a great deal and we continue to lose thousands of innocent people.

The congregation of our church who are here this afternoon to greet Your Royal Highness have lost brothers and sisters, their livelihoods and their land. Iraq is going through a most difficult time with Christians killed simply because they were Christians. My church alone has lost an Archbishop, five priests, several deacons and thousands of innocent followers. About fifty of our churches and monasteries were attacked and destroyed as well as our homes.

Syria is going through an equally turbulent time, where the same thing is happening. Several priests were killed. These militant terrorists have kidnapped two prominent Archbishops of Aleppo, H.E. Gregorious Yohanna Ibrahim from our church and H.E. Bolous Yaziji from our sisterly Greek Orthodox Church and nothing is known about them for nearly eight months.

Two weeks ago, they have kidnapped twelve nuns from the famous St Tekkla Monastery in the ancient Christian town of Ma'loula. They have attacked Christian towns and villages, Ma'loula, Saddad and Dear Atia as well as destroying around sixty old churches in these cities and towns. In the last two years, more than half a million Christians had fled.

We fully support and appreciate Britain's stand against terrorism and the help it provides for the victims of terrorism throughout the world. Your visit today, Your Royal Highness, is an illustration of your support and spiritual concern for those the victims.



At the same time like to greet Prince Ghazi bin Mohammed, and through His Royal Highness extend our sincere thanks to the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan that continues to keep its borders open to the Palestinians, Iraqis and now Syrians. May God bless Jordan, His Majesty King Abdullah II ibn Al-Hussein, the Jordanian Government and its people who together continue to support so many in our time of need and conscious of all the humanitarian and financial pressures which the country suffers as a result.

Most of our Syriac people in the United Kingdom are immigrants. I am proud of them. They are well educated with about 95% of them are doctors, engineers, scientist, lawyers and business people. They live in peace and they love Britain and have a profound sense of loyalty to Her Majesty and British democracy. Some of them have now assumed British nationality.

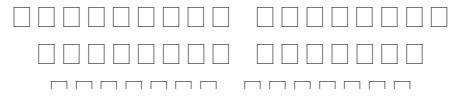
We never forget that we are the indigenous (inveterate) people of Mesopotamia, the cradle of civilisation. We are still using the Syriac-Aramaic language in our prayers and liturgy. Our Syriac Orthodox Church of Antioch was the first Christian church outside Jerusalem. It was established in 37AD by St Peter in Antioch where the believers in Jesus were first called Christians.

Your Royal Highness, we appreciate your gesture towards us. We recall your presence in Turkey at St Paul Cathedral in 1998 for the Byzantine evening and your visit to Al-Za'faran Monastery in Mardin, some ten years ago.

We are trying now to buy the next-door church building which is currently a school for the deaf that is for sale and create a centre and school to teach our children our Syriac-Aramaic language so we can preserve our heritage. We trust in God and even in these very difficult financial times we hope we can count on our friends to partner with us in this important project.

Finally, we thank Your Royal Highness for your historical visit to our small and Holy church which contains the relics of St Thomas the Apostle and a small piece from the belt of the Virgin Mary. This church was built through the donations of this congregation and our good and longstanding friends in this country including Mr Nadhmi Auchy and Mr Anthony Bailey who are present today.

To conclude Your Royal Highness and distinguished guests, please allow us to present the British National Anthem in Syriac as a token of our love towards our new



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homeland, the United Kingdom. Long live Her Majesty The Queen and May God bless Her, bless Your Royal Highness and the Royal Family and bless all the British people.

I ask you now all to stand. Thank you.