

Patriarchal Message

His Holiness Moran Mor Ignatius Zakka I Iwas

Patriarch of Antioch and All the East, the Supreme Head of the

Universal Syrian Orthodox Church

at the

*(at the Public Meeting IN Kochi, Kerala, India, on October 19,2008, in connection with the
Priestly Golden Jubilee of His Beatitude Catholicos Mor Baselios Thomas I of India)*

Our beloved Brother-in-Christ Your Beatitude Catholicos Mor Baselios Thomas-I, the Jubilarian, Your Eminences the Archbishops and Bishops, Honorable Home Minister Sri. S. Sivaraj Pattel, Mr. V.S. Achuthanandan the Honorable Chief Minister of the State of Kerala, Mr. Oommen Chandy the Opposition Leader, other Honorable Ministers, Respected Members of the Parliament and Members of the State Legislative Assembly, Distinguished Guest, the Reverend Clergy, Ladies and Gentlemen:

We are very happy to be here, in India, once again. We had first visited India as an Archbishop in 1964 as a member of the official delegation which accompanied our predecessor, Patriarch Mor Yacoub III of blessed memory. Later, we were able to come to this blessed country three times as Patriarch – in 1982 which was our longest Apostolic Visit to India; in 2000 for the Episcopal Golden Jubilee of the late lamented Metropolitan of our Knanaya Archdiocese in India His Grace Mor Clemis Abraham; and in 2004 on the occasion when our Holy Church in India celebrated the beginning of the Silver Jubilee Celebrations of our enthronement as the Patriarch of Antioch and All the East. On those occasions we were all received by the State – by the Central Government of India as well as the Governments of the States in India that we visited – and also by the people, especially of the State of Kerala, irrespective of creed or caste. We have pleasant memories of those visits; and we are thankful to all for the same. And

this is our fourth Apostolic Visit to India as Patriarch - this time, mainly, to share in your joy as you celebrate the Priestly Golden Jubilee of our beloved Brother-in-Christ His Beatitude Catholicos Mor Baselios Thomas I of our Jacobite Syrian Christian Church in India which is an integral part of our Universal Syrian Orthodox Church. And we thank the Honorable Chief Minister of Kerala and his Government for receiving us warmly as a State Guest. The hospitality of the people of Kerala is well known. We also thank all other Distinguished Dignitaries who grace this meeting with their honorable presence. We feel honored to be in your midst today.

The world in which we live is changing so fast that we have a generation born after the World Wide Web and mobile telephony became common. The advancement in the field of science has enabled people to communicate with one another easily as well as to travel more frequently. This has in effect made short the distances between nations, and people have started migrating from one nation to another in search of Jobs, businesses and for other purposes. On the one hand, this has given many opportunities to the people to find better living conditions; but on the other hand, it has also given rise to many problems. Some nations and peoples are becoming richer and richer and some poorer and poorer. This has given rise to conflicts between and within nations. Growing materialism and selfishness are also making people turn away from God and destroying the bonds of love and tolerance which previously existed among different nations and peoples. Our increased knowledge in the field of science and technology should not turn us away from God, but rather, take us closer to God who blesses us with such knowledge. Again, we should not forget that as children of God, we are all brothers and sisters; and this, in turn, should enable us to love one another and to live in harmony with all. Religious leaders, social workers and political leaders can, play a very positive role by promoting and ensuring better understanding, better unity and better cooperation among all peoples.

All major religions of the world had their origin in the continent of Asia, and among the various nations in Asia, India has a unique position - of having received the various faiths with tolerance and respect. In fact, Christianity came to India before it reached Europe. According to the recorded tradition, St.Thomas, one of the twelve chosen Apostles of our Lord Jesus Christ arrived in Kerala in AD 52 and through him many came to know of our Lord Jesus Christ and became Christians. The local rulers of those times and of later centuries received the Christians well, and some of them even granted the Christians special privileges. Hindus, Muslims, Christians and all other religions lived here in peace and harmony with one another, and we believe that it is so even now. We pray God Almighty that this glorious nation of India may continue to remain a model for religious tolerance, peace and harmony.

On this occasion we admonish you to grow spiritually by maintaining strong relationship with God, human and nature. Continue the mission of Jesus Christ in our context by identifying with marginalized people, and sharing our resources with the needy people.

And, may we now come to the main reason for our presence here today. As you know, our Jacobite Syrian Church in India is celebrating the Priestly Golden Jubilee of our beloved Brother-in-Christ His Beatitude Catholicos Mor Baselios Thomas I. His Beatitude has lived a full life as a Priest and a Bishop. He was ordained a Priest in 1958 by the late Patriarchal Delegate of India His Eminence Mor Julius Elias Qoro. This was a blessing for him and it helped him to earn a good reputation as an outstanding preacher, retreat father and organizer. His great role in building up the Kolenchery Medical Mission in its early years is definitely worth mentioning. When, in the 1970's problems started in our Church in India, God chose him and he, along with the late President of the Holy Episcopal Synod of India, His Eminence Mor Gregorios Geevarghese, was consecrated a Metropolitan with the title ' Mor Dionysius Thomas'

for our Church in India. They both worked hard to defend the apostolic faith and practices of our Syrian Church and strengthened the ancient canonical connection of our Church in India with the Holy Apostolic See of Antioch and All the East. At this moment we also remember outstanding leadership of the late Catholicos H.B. Baselios Paulose II in protecting our apostolic faith. After the demise of His Grace Mor Gregorios Geevarghese, we were led by God in 2002 to consecrate His Beatitude as Catholicos for our Church in India with the title 'Mor Baselios Thomas I'. It is worth mentioning that it was during the time of His Beatitude that our Church in India was able to achieve great progress. To facilitate better administration, it now has a Constitution which we approved for it in 2002. Ever since His Beatitude took charge as the Catholicos and Metropolitan Trustee, the Regional Head of our Church in India, it has grown much. His Beatitude has led our Church with clear perception by overcoming the various oppositions. We understand that greatest encouragement of His Beatitude is his strong support from our faithful people. We realize that the Synod, Working Committee, Managing Committee and the Malankara Jacobite Syrian Christian Association are united under him. Indeed this unity has accelerated the spiritual growth of our Church. His Beatitude's contribution in the field of education is commendable. Lot of educational institutions have been started under his leadership. Thus Church has now many institutions providing valuable service not only to the members of our Church but for society at large. The wonderful Patriarchal Centre at Puthencruz which is not far from the city of Cochin is a standing monument to his great services to our Church in India. We decorated him in 2007 with the title: "the Yacoub Burdono of Malankara". It may be recalled that Mor Yacoub Burdono who lived in the sixth century AD was a great leader whose untiring efforts helped our Syrian Orthodox Church to overcome a great crisis period in its history.

His Beatitude is indeed a great administrator; and in recognition of the same, on this occasion of His Beatitude's Priestly Golden Jubilee, we congratulate His Beatitude for all his achievements to date and pray God Almighty to grant His Beatitude good health and long life to administer our Church in India for many more years to come. We also now request His Beatitude to come forward and receive from us this set of pectoral Icons with chain and also a ring which we present to His Beatitude as a token of our deep love and respect for His Beatitude. Thank you.

May God bless you all.