

**Rede von Bischof Prof. Dr. Martin Hein beim Empfang seiner  
Delegation durch Patriarch Ignatius IV Hazim in der Rum-  
Orthodoxen Kirche von Antiochia und dem Ganzen Orient am  
10. März 2011 in Damaskus**

Your Beatitude,  
dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

first of all I greet Your Beatitude and everybody in this hall in the name of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, who came into flesh in order to save humanity from sin and war against God, against each other and against creation.

Myself and all members of my delegation are highly honored to come to Damascus following the kind invitation of Your Beatitude.

Ahead of all other words of gratitude let me read out the watchword that Christians of many denominations around the globe share on this day from the book of Daniel chapter 6, v. 26, saying: ***“He is the living God, enduring forever. His kingdom shall never be destroyed.”***

This word clearly reminds us of the foundation on which our churches' fellowship has been built since 20 years now: The common praise and prayer to the Triune God. God shall direct our hearts and minds over there in Germany and here in Syria and shall enable us to behave as followers of our Lord in this world.

After recalling the roots of our common faith I would like to introduce the members of my delegation from the Evangelical Church of Kurhessen- Waldeck to Your Beatitude: *(Names and functions)*

In September 2010 we had the privilege to start celebrating this anniversary of our church fellowship holding an Academic Symposium on the relationship between Orthodoxy and Protestantism in our Evangelical Academy Hofgeismar. This Symposium also included reflections on the history and development of our relationship. Gratefully we found how rich the communication and our practice of mutual learning and sharing has been in these 20

years. Plenty of visits of church leaders finding their climax in Your Beatitude's visit to Kassel during the period of service of my honorable predecessor Late Bishop Prof. Dr. Christian Zippert in 1993 have been accompanied by exchanges back and forth in the fields of Theological Education, Pastoral Seminars, Diaconal services, Women's and Women theologians' exchange etc. We are very grateful to God for keeping us together and I often tell people on my Ecumenical visits that we are proud of this special fellowship. Of course, when we come together this time, we can not only celebrate, but have to share very sad news and discuss difficult concerns too: These days we experience a world torn apart by hatred and wars. People stand up against others, fighting and killing their wives and children, destroying their homes, workshops and towns and even their churches and mosques. There are serious attempts to extinguish the foundations of other people's lives and sweep away religious minorities from one's own country. A well known Newspaper in German titled last week as follows about the persecution of Christians in Iraq: *"They do have one choice only: Either to die or to flee...!"*

Mutual exclusion from participation in life resources, quitting basic intercultural solidarity and other atrocities are spreading constantly in these years. The attempts of political rulers to fight injustice and terror by other injustice such as occupying countries in order to punish dictators or hitting back against terrorism by military power seems to fail completely.

And one of the most frightening factors to my mind is the simplified identification of other people's views and interests with their religion making all Moslems in the eyes of Christian people in Western countries "Islamists and terrorists" and on the other hand all Christians in many peoples' eyes in Arab countries "Crusaders and colonialist invaders". - This simplified and disrespectful views of people of other cultures and nations I thoroughly reject! And more than this: From the bottom of my heart I am convinced that religious freedom is not divisible! One cannot demand it for one's own faith

and community and withhold it from others who are strangers in one's country.

It is our common Christian responsibility wherever we live and witness in this world to approach people of other nations and especially people of other religions with respect, showing them the preempting love and tenderness of our Lord Jesus Christ whom we follow and who sets all people free to think of God and approach the Holy God as a loving Father. To him we can only be invited and invite others gently instead of fighting them as enemies.

Therefore, especially in this world that economically and traffic-wise has grown together so much and at the same time has been torn apart by hatred and wars we are grateful to stand in this deeply rooted Christian fellowship with the Greek Orthodox Church of Antioch and all the East. Together we want to witness to our faith that God has created a new humanity by himself becoming flesh in Christ – and that he has called his churches around the globe to remain one in Christ's body.

As Your Beatitude has expressed it already when visiting our church in 1993 as well as when meeting Pope John Paul II of the Roman Catholic church in 2001, we are firmly convinced that, no Christian community can really exist and grow towards maturity without the fellow Christian communities and churches around the globe.

In this visit in the midst of political insecurities we see an opportunity to reaffirm our purpose to grow together as different parts of the body of Christ in worshipping the one Lord while at the same time respecting our different church traditions. Our fellowship shall be strengthened furthermore through mutual assistance in learning and serving our societies in both contexts.

It is our special prayer that this Fellowship may strengthen Your Beatitude and all other members of your church to live as witnesses and servants of Christ in their home countries. In future much more than in the past this could include cooperation in social and diaconal education and services about which we are to have intensive reflections these days.

