

***Welcome address for Bishop Dr. Hazim Ghattas and the delegation from
University of Balamand /Lebanon – Kassel – Church head office May 2nd
2012***

Bishop Prof. Dr. Martin Hein

Respected Bishop,

Dear Professor Abou Mrad

Dear brothers in Christ Fayez Mansour, Chehadeh and Najjar,

*Dear brothers and sisters from the Evangelical Church of
Kurhessen-Waldeck,*

today, I have the great honor and joy to welcome you Bishop Dr. Ghattas and your delegation here in Kassel. First of all I thank you for being with us, especially during these days and months of political unrest and changes in the Arab world. So, please feel at home with us. We invite you to share with us whatever you want to tell us about the situation of your church and university at present. And we encourage you, to also tell us about your observations and the questions you get when travelling in Kurhessen-Waldeck.

I understand this reception as an opportunity to strengthen the friendship between the Rum-Orthodox Church of Antioch and all the East and my church.

I am really excited about the fact, that so many friends from Kassel and from amongst the “friends of Antioch” have followed my invitation for this day. Others kindly asked for excuse and were quite sad not to be able to come to Kassel today.

All this gives witness to the intense study of the situation in the Middle East by many of our church-members these days. In fact we are always very much concerned for your and your families' health

and security and we keep praying and hoping that soon peace and stability will be restored in Syria.

Now it is only a little more than one year ago that we met each other in Balamand during a visit of my delegation in order to share reports about our work and life in the two churches. At that time – in March 2011 – many people in Syria and Lebanon still hoped that the challenges of democratic changes in Arab countries which had led to serious conflicts already in Tunisia, Egypt, Bahrain and especially in Libya, would not come up in the same manner in Syria. Many pondered that, there were changes in economic and social life needed in Syria. But they hoped in fact that, President Asaad and his administration would implement such changes by themselves and not wait until unrest and civil war broke out. Now, after one more year we all know a bit more. And we are quite disappointed that peace could not prevail.

These days – when watching the news or catching some of the sparse informations coming from Damascus directly – we even feel that, this conflict could at the end of the day harm the Christian churches in Syria as badly as it happened in the neighboring country Iraq a few years ago. So, I kindly ask you, dear Bishop, the question that I have posed in other speeches too: Could it be that the “Arabellion” or “Arab spring” (as it is often called) could mark the autumn or even winter of Christianity in the region??

One year ago you Patriarch, His Beatitude Ignatius IV Hazim, still was confident that the political leadership in Syria as well as the authorities of other religious fractions of mainly Sunnite Islam would respect the age, the time-honored faith tradition and the present ethical and social-diaconal contributions of your church and of other

