



Standing Conference of Oriental Orthodox Churches

To the Clergy and the Faithful of the Eritrean Orthodox Tewahdo Church in North America who are Standing with His Holiness Abune Antonios I:

Christ is Risen!

On the meeting it held of May 3, 2021 the bishops of the Standing Conference of the Oriental Orthodox Churches took up several issues. Foremost on its agenda was the topic of His Holiness Abune Antonios I, Patriarch of the Eritrean Orthodox Church, as well as the widely reported preparation the Synod of the Eritrean Orthodox Church has undertaken to install another uncannical patriarch for a second time under pressure from the Government of Eritrea.

Ever since H. H. Abune Antonios was illegally deposed in 2005 and was put under severe house arrest in early 2006, your sister churches in the Oriental Orthodox Churches have called numerous times on the bishops, clergy and the faithful of the Eritrean Orthodox Church to stand firm in their faith and to persevere in your fealty to your Patriarch who has set an example in paying a price for his faith and his church.

On behalf of the Standing Conference of the Oriental Orthodox Churches, on October 23, 2019, we expressed to you that “what remains of the Eritrean Orthodox Holy Synod intends to appoint another bishop to replace His Holiness Abune Antonios I as Patriarch in the coming months, despite the fact that His Holiness is still alive and has not been formally convicted of any heresy or immoral act. As indicated in our previous letter – dated July 23, 2019 – this violates the ancient canons common to us all which dictate that a Patriarch cannot be removed without a formal ecclesiastical trial and not merely at the behest of a secular ruler.”

Sadly, another announcement has been made recently indicating that this is about to take place any day now. Therefore, the Standing Conference of the Oriental Orthodox Churches call on the clergy and the faithful of the Eritrean Orthodox Church to remain true to your canonical patriarch, the shepherd of your beloved church. It is an inspiration to all of us Orthodox believers the world over that so many Eritrean clergy and monastics have and continue to pay so much sacrifice because they refused to do anything that harms the Church. In this time of great trial we entreat you with the words of the apostle Paul: “Watch, stand fast in the faith, be brave, be strong (1 Corinthians 16:13).

Please let us remember in this and in all things, that whatever influence the government may be able to exert upon the Synod and Church of Eritrea, as St. Peter and the other Holy Apostles declared boldly and without fear, “We must obey God rather than human beings!” (Acts 5:29). It has always been the practice of the Orthodox faithful throughout history to stand for Christ and for the canonical integrity of the One, Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic Church that He Himself established, even to the point of martyrdom and the shedding of our blood. We must ask ourselves – as St. Paul asked – “Am I now trying to win the approval of human beings, or of God? Or am I trying to please people? If I were still trying to please people, I would not be a servant of Christ” (Galatians 1:10). For indeed, if we are trying to please people – no matter how powerful or highly placed – then we have no right to call ourselves servants of Christ.



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May God protect the Eritrean Orthodox Church, is our prayer.

With Love in Our Savior Jesus Christ and on behalf of
the Standing Conference of Oriental Orthodox Churches,



Bishop David
President of the Standing Conference of Oriental Orthodox Churches of America
Bishop, Coptic Orthodox Diocese of New York & New England
Acting Patriarchal Exarch, Coptic Orthodox Archdiocese of North America

May 13, 2021