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Racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related forms of intolerance, follow-up and implementation of the Durban Declaration and Programme of Action

Written statement* submitted by the Sovereign Military Order of the Temple of Jerusalem (OSMTH), a non-governmental organization in special consultative status

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement which is circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

[11 May 2016]

* This written statement is issued, unedited, in the language(s) received from the submitting non-governmental organization(s).

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STATEMENT ON THE DESTRUCTION OF SACRED SITES AND ON THE REFUGEES CRISIS

We fully support the Human Rights Declaration and the right to people to practice their faith in a peaceful environment.

We welcome the panel on effects of terrorism on the enjoyment by all persons of human rights and fundamental freedoms (HRS res. 28/17)

We recognise the importance of historical sites of sacred sites as part of the world's heritage and of the roots of human society

We are facing issues which pose grave threats to the Christian Faith, as well as all other faiths, to the stability of both the Middle East and, in the near term, possibly major parts of Europe; and which, regrettably, bring back past practices of people against peoples of the most evil type; and we feel that three issues pose grave threats to the Christian Faith, to the other faiths represented in the Middle East, to the stability of both the Middle East and, in the near term, possibly major parts of Europe; and regrettably, bring back past practices of people against peoples of the most evil type; These threats will, inevitably if not addressed, be not only to Christians but to all peoples of faith and to the basis of society itself.

These practices are challenging the best planning of the European Union, the United Nations, many of the governments of the Middle East and the Faiths of the Sons of Abraham;

The **first** of these challenges involves the assault upon the cultural and religious heritage of many of the great religions of the world, and in particular of the Christian Faith;

- what was believed in 2001 to be an isolated attack by the Taliban on the Buddhist sculptures of the Buddhas of Bamiyan has widened into a fierce assault against the heritage of many faiths;
- these attacks have continued unabated with ever growing intensity by Islamist extremists, examples of which are Christian cultural heritage sites in Kosovo and Methohja, followed by an "ISIS"/DAESH campaign to exterminate the Christian presence in all parts of Iraq and Syria under their control, including churches in Mosul and the Christian church of the Virgin Mary in Syria;
- DAESH, in their uncivilized rage, further focused on Muslim historic and cultural sites, including the Muslim Sufi sites such as the destruction of the tombs of the Sufi Saints in the Aleppo countryside; and carried out the unspeakable and barbaric acts of pillaging for profit, or otherwise demolishing, one of the most historic collections of cultural and religious artifacts in Syria and the murder of the Syrian Antiquities Director Khaled al-Asaad;
- DAESH has taken all opportunities to pillage synagogues and Jewish religious artifacts within their reach;
- many of these sites are on the list of World Heritage in Danger assembled by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO);
- We strongly believe that such acts of destruction are abhorrent, unacceptable in a civilized world, and must be viewed as direct threats against all, or parts, of the Great Religions of the world; and that such activities must be made public and opposed and that NGOs should raise awareness of this threat by visiting such sites, as and when appropriate and feasible

A **second** threat to the very existence of Christianity has been defined by Pope Francis of the Roman Catholic Church, during a recent speech in August to a large assemblage in South America, when he said: "Today we are dismayed to see how, in the Middle East and elsewhere in the world, many of our brothers and sisters are persecuted, tortured and killed for their faith in Jesus"... He continued, "In this third world war, waged piece-meal, which we are now experiencing; a form of genocide is taking place";

- this most barbaric act – genocide – has occurred throughout history, on every continent and against many peoples;
- amongst the Christians the martyred people of Armenia stand foremost in our minds and in our prayers;

- We firmly believe that, if this “third world war” is beginning and Christian peoples with their belief are at risk of extermination, we must raise our voices in immediate opposition to this potential tragedy and again, through international forums and the faithful of all religions of the world, call on humanity to confront and stop such a horrible action;

these horrible occurrences are now creating a **third** challenge, as whole populations of peoples from the Middle East, which include both Christians and Muslims, are forced to flee in huge numbers, to Europe including countries ranging from Russia to the United Kingdom;

- this challenge to our common humanity, driven by barbaric and genocidal acts, must be vigorously met and turned back;
- We willingly accept the need to assist in undertaking advocacy and providing humanitarian relief to alleviate this struggle, following the guidance of the great religious leaders of the Eastern and Western Churches;
- the Protestant Regional Churches in Germany, our host country for this meeting, remind us of Psalm 36:7 which states: “How precious is your steadfast love, O God! All people may take refuge in the shadow of your wings!”;
- to that end we join with the other Sons of Abraham and their leadership, such as the King of Jordan, in seeking to develop a structure that will allow all displaced Christians and others, who desire to return to their historic homes in the Middle East, a future opportunity to do so with dignity and happiness.

We urge Governments, faith organizations and NGOs for the implementation of such advocacy and humanitarian relief and for the development of a “Return Home” policy for Middle Eastern Christians and others in a safe and economically sustainable environment.
