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Series A: Writings and Addresses. 1947-1991

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STATEMENT BY RABBI MARC H TANENBAUM, DIRECTOR OF INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS OF THE AMERICAN JEWISH COMMITTEE, AT GREEK ORTHODOX DINNER HONORING ARCHBISHOP IAKOVOS AND COMMEMORATING 100TH ANNIVERSARY OF BIRTH OF ECUMENICAL PATRIARCH ATHENAGORAS, SUNDAY, OCTOBER 2, 1986, WALDORF-ASTORIA HOTEL, NEW YORK CITY

It is a rare and special privilege for me to be united to address once again this distinguished audience of Greek Orthodox Christians who have assembled to honor your great Primate and my beloved friend of many years, His Eminence Archbishop Iakovos. He embodies the noblest virtues of ecumenism and reconciliation that characterized the life and career of the Ecumenical Patriarch Athenagoras whose centennial birthday we have come to acknowledge this evening.

The friendship and mutual regard which have dominated the relationship between Archbishop Iakovos and myself over several decades are grounded in larger historic realities. Hellenism and Hebraism, in all their complexities, are the foundation-stones of Western civilization.

Western democratic societies are inconceivable without the fundamental contributions of the Greek and Jewish peoples across the past millenia. In innumerable ways, the fate and destiny of the great Greek and Jewish peoples are interdependent. In light of that historic reality, no person, no force can ultimately succeed in severing those profound bonds nor in alienating Greeks from Jews, nor Jews from Greeks.

There are problems outstanding today between Greece and Israel, and between Greeks and Jews, both of whom cherish the

centrality of their ancient homelands in their lives. But, the paths we have chosen to deal with such difficulties are those of dialogue, reconciliation, and healing. Provocation and alienation are not the modes that Greeks and Jews choose to resolve their problems.

Whatever the differences, I know that responsible Jewish leadership is convinced that the avenues of dialogue are always open with Archbishop Iakovos and Greece's Ambassadors to the United States and to the United Nations. And we plan to pursue that dialogue with them in the days ahead.

I wish not only to recall the historic context of the Greek-Jewish relationship, but also to say a brief word about the importance of the interrelationship of Greeks and Jews in America.

I have devoted the past 25 years of my life to building bridges of understanding, mutual knowledge and respect between Christians and Jews, and particularly between Greek Orthodox Christians and Jews. One of the critical turning points in that relationship took place about 20 years ago when Archbishop Iakovos asked for the support of the Jewish community in behalf of a Congressional resolution that would recognize Greek Orthodox Christianity as one of "the Four Major Faiths of America."

Until that time, only Catholicism, Protestantism and Judaism were publicly acknowledged as "The Three Major Faiths," as if Greek Orthodoxy did not exist. My response to Archbishop Iakovos' request was immediate. "Of course, we would support that sense of Congress resolution that publicly established Greek Orthodoxy as a major faith of the American people," I told the Archbishop. And so we issued a public statement supporting that resolution, and we urged members of the U.S. Congress, particularly those of the Jewish faith, to advocate the recognition of Greek Orthodoxy through this resolution.

The Congressional resolution was adopted unanimously, and Greek Orthodoxy has since then been recognized as one of "The Four Major Faiths of America."

That experience symbolizes the true state of Greek-Jewish relations in America.