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Kippur 5778
Mr. President, Ladies and Gentlemen of the Board, dear Friends,

On this solemn day of Yom Kippur, we are very honoured to have with us at the Egyptian Oratory Eliahou Hanabi, the Minister Plenipotentiary, Deputy Chief of Mission at the Embassy of Egypt in Paris Mr. Hesham el Mekwad together with the First Secretary of the Embassy Mr. Mohamed Kandil. --- *Ahlan wassahlan*.

I believe it would be necessary to go back more than 60 years to witness the presence of an official representative of Egypt among Jews from Egypt during the prayers of Rosh Hashana or Yom Kippur. It is therefore an exceptional event. We are today at the same time moved, touched and grateful, as would have been those who are no longer with us.

The deep gratitude of the Jews of Egypt must also be publicly expressed for the voluntary action of the Egyptian government concerning the preservation of the communal Jewish heritage in Egypt, an integral part of the country's history.

To that effect, under the guidance of President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi relayed by the Minister of Antiquities Mr. Khaled El Anany, the 3 Jewish cemeteries in downtown Alexandria are now shielded from predators as they have recently been classified as historical monuments. An individual survey of each grave is in progress. Similarly, just two days ago, the Menashe synagogue in Alexandria was granted the same protection. In addition, a quantitative and qualitative survey of all the Sifrei Torah in Cairo was undertaken in May 2017 thanks to the expertise of a Sofer recommended by the Chief Rabbi of France. Furthermore, a photographic survey was freely made of all existing synagogues.

We are deeply grateful for all this; beyond, we also wish to thank the Minister of Culture Mr. Helmy el Namnam who explicitly promised us a copy of our registers of civil and religious records, as well as our community archives. These are to be held by the Consistoire of France, subject to the agreement of the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Egypt, the very Minister responsible for the Embassy of Egypt. This concerns all Jews from Egypt and their descendants, for it is our religious status, our individual and our collective history.

The government has also approved the new statutes of the *Drop of Milk* association in Cairo, whose members are Egyptians of every faith concerned with this heritage. Together with the president of the community, they battle on a daily basis with few resources but a lot of energy to develop and protect our heritage. Among other things they plan on launching an exhibition hall, a cultural centre. They are working to protect the Cairo cemetery, to index of libraries and maintenance of the synagogues; they are there on all fronts. We can see the promise of a future long-term patrimonial structure.

And last but not least, the most striking fact among all these gestures of openness is the decision by the Minister of Antiquities to allocate the sum of 5 million Euros for the

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complete restoration of the great synagogue of Alexandria, Eliahou Hanabi, eponymous of our oratory. Work has begun and will last one year. It is the fulfilment of the promise made to us in 2009. In view of the local economic and security difficulties, which are open knowledge, this decision is not only very generous but also a very courageous one.

The children who ran in its alleyways, the teenagers who were trained there, the young people who were married there, and all those who prayed and attended the devotion of their parents and grandparents, give thanks, through you, to the Egyptian people, its Minister of Antiquities and its President, Mr. Abdel Fattah al-Sissi, for dignifying the memory of our parents and grandparents.

But also, this synagogue by its location and its history is a symbol of our uninterrupted presence in the land of Egypt from the foundation of Alexandria to its recent past. By its style and size it is a symbol of the revival of modern Egypt to which the Jews contributed so much; it is an exemplary symbol of living in harmony, that leaders of the present world should rightly envy. Its restoration bears an implicit recognition, a resounding message of peace and a generous hand offered in friendship. Thank you, therefore, on behalf of the Jews of Alexandria, the Jews of Egypt and all the Jews who aspire to true peace in that part of the world.

Of course, there are still problems to be solved: most importantly as I mentioned, the availability of a copy of our registers, sorting the lamentable state of Bassatine Cemetery in Cairo, restoring other synagogues, and reinstating the Abu Hassira pilgrimage. But whether it is *Inchaallah*, or *B'Ezrat Hashem,* we are confident that this will surely come to pass even if it is *chowaya chowaya*. Our association Nebi Daniel, which has been involved with this preservation work for 14 years, now knows that hope exists and that the uniqueness of our common past will guide your generosity.

The Egypt we knew is still in the hearts of most of us and now that Egypt, which no longer wished to know us, has not quite forgotten us. Allow me therefore to paraphrase from the Book of Exodus "A new leader arose who did remember Joseph." May he, like you, be enrolled in the Book of Life *bel salam* - with *shalom*.

S. Y. Fedida
Co-Founder