

## **HEARTFELT WELCOME FOR HIS BEATITUDE BY THE HELLENIC COMMUNITY OF MADAGASCAR**

**On 15th February 2008, His Beatitude Theodoros II, Pope and Patriarch of Alexandria and All Africa** was welcomed with joy by the small in number yet significant in works Hellenic Community of Madagascar. In the Holy Cathedral of the Dormition of the Theotokos in Antananarivo, the first Church built by Greek immigrants 60 years ago, under the flags of the Patriarchate, Greece and Madagascar, the inscription "Blessed is He that comes..." was prevalent, written in French and in the local dialect. Many children dressed in traditional costumes, sang and danced with great joy, seeing the Primate of the Throne of St Mark. Present among all the people were the Honourary Consul General of Greece Mr Panayiotis Taloumis, the Chairman of the Hellenic Community Mr Christos Spiliopoulos, the former Chairlady of the Hellenic Community of Cameroon Mrs Chloe Balanou, representatives of Missionary societies from Greece and many local Orthodox Christians.

The **local Bishop, His Grace Ignatios**, in welcoming His Beatitude, stressed the importance of his visit to Madagascar which shows his paternal interest for the newly-illuminated native brothers and sisters, spoke of the historic path taken by the local church, as well as by his own predecessor, the late Bishop Nektarios. "It is right that you are called the Patriarch of peace and of love, because this is what the world needs today", said His Grace Ignatios, addressing His Beatitude. In his reply, His Beatitude expressed his thanks to the few Greeks remaining in the country for all that they have contributed to the Church. "These are the Greeks who, wherever they went, built churches, and glorified our history and our culture". "At some time, we all took Odysseus' route. Greece, however, will always be our beloved Itaca...the Greek immigrant, even at the ends of the earth, did not forget his language, built schools; did not forget his faith and built churches. I assure you that I will always be at your side"

**Remembering all the African countries** where he served as a missionary, His Beatitude ended by saying: " I gave a part of my heart to the continent of the future called Africa. It is worth it"