



Stenogram of the meeting of Russian President Vladimir Putin with His Holiness Patriarch Kirill and leaders of religious associations in Russia

On November 4, 2020, the National Unity Day, President of the Russian Federation Vladimir Putin had a traditional talk with His Holiness Patriarch Kirill of Moscow and All Russia and leaders of religious associations in Russia. This year, the meeting was held in videoconference mode.

Putin: Good afternoon, dear friends,

I am pleased to welcome you to our meeting; greetings to all representatives of traditional religions of Russia!

And first of all, I would like to congratulate you and all the citizens of Russia, our large, multinational country, on the National Unity Day!

This state holiday has been timed to coincide with the heroic events of the early 17th century when the Russian people put an end to the tragedy of the Time of Troubles.

Among those who rose up against the internal strife and humiliation of their country were people of various ethnic backgrounds and confessions. They were united in the struggle against foreign invaders, treachery and betrayal and they won; they restored the integrity of the state and its power and saved the Fatherland.

We know that such a great civic feat was performed by those who are devoted to the Fatherland, those who are convinced that their unity is a powerful, irresistible force.

In our history there have been many examples when all the people would stand up for their country. It happened in 1812 and again in the unprecedented trials of the Great Patriotic War. The courage of the defenders of the Motherland did not know national distinctions. They were inspired by love for their families, children, home, and the feeling of brotherly camaraderie – the moral values that underlie the culture and tradition of all our peoples, our traditional religions.

Patriotism and unity of our citizens, common moral ideals continue to unite our society, our vast, multinational, multi-confessional country.

All of our peoples used to endure together hardships and joys, to achieve great victories, to pass the harshest tests and have historically proven their choice to live together in peace and harmony.

The traditions of kind, respectful relationships between people of different ethnicities and religious beliefs have been left to us by our ancestors. But it is not enough to be simply proud of this living spiritual heritage and of the experience of creating a unique civilization. Of course, we have the right to be proud and we should be. But this is not enough. These values need to be protected, strengthened and nurtured. This is our common duty to this generation and to future generations as well.

It is important to understand that the world is going through deep changes. Traditional values face serious challenges. Unfortunately, extremely difficult and sensitive issues of interethnic and interreligious relations sometimes become a subject of speculations and unscrupulous geopolitical games. Extremists and radicals seek to parasitize on them inciting mutual hatred and animosity.

I would like to repeat that interethnic and interreligious peace is the keystone for our vast country. It needs constant attention from the authorities, from society, and from the media. The work here should be delicate, meticulous and comprehensive. And we are trying to act precisely so – in the most delicate and constructive manner.

The more so that the situation in a number of countries, as we have seen, is complicated; we see what actions of all kinds of provocateurs have led to; those who, under the guise of freedom of speech, offend the feelings of believers, and those who use it as a pretext for justifying violence and intolerance. There is only one result: conflicts grow within society like a snowball and can smolder for years and decades.

Together we must do everything we can to prevent developments like this in our country.

The spiritual leaders of Russia have a special role to harmonize interethnic and interreligious relations and prevent extremism and terrorism. People listen to your opinions, your words, and when you voice your position of solidarity, your clear commitment to the values of peace, kindness and mercy – this is extremely important.

I would like to point out the great potential of religious organizations in social service. Representatives of all religions are contributing to our common struggle against the spread of the dangerous virus.

You unite caring people around you, and they together with the clergy become involved in voluntary work, sometimes risking their own lives in order to support those who need help and care, regardless of their ethnicity or religion.

I will underscore again that the clergy work in close proximity to patients infected with the coronavirus and they sometimes risk their own lives to support their neighbours. Unfortunately, tragedies can happen when they themselves die while selflessly carrying out their pastoral duty, selflessly and not for money.

I have stressed many times that the most important thing for us is the absolute value of every human life. And this choice is dictated to a large extent by those values that underlie all the traditional religions of Russia: Orthodox Christianity, other Christian confessions, Islam, Buddhism, and Judaism.

It is not accidental that lying here on the table to the left of me are four sacred texts – the Bible, the Quran, the Torah and Kangyur with their intransigent truths. And the key, the defining value in each is love for other people, for your neighbor, regardless of race, ethnicity or tradition. And when the scriptures speak of neighbors or brothers, we should understand this to mean not only people of the same faith but also all people in general, because all people are equal before the Most High in all world religions.

And today I would like to refer to a few words from these books. Allow me to quote a few.

The Bible. “Greater love hath no man than this, that he lay down his life for his friend.” Or: “Whosoever claims to love God yet hates a brother or sister is a liar. For whoever does not love their brother or sister whom he sees, how can he love God, whom he does not see?”

And the Quran. “Say, Muhammad: I ask of you no reward for proclaiming God’s faith, only affection among the near of kin.” “Whosoever does a good deed, we will increase its goodness by two times.” “Surely Allah is with those who fear Good and who do good deeds.”

The Torah. “You shall not hate your brother in your heart. You shall rebuke your neighbour, and not bear sin because of him. You shall neither take revenge from nor bear a grudge; you shall love your neighbour as yourself.”

And finally, Buddha’s words. “Hatred does not cease by hatred; hatred ceases by love. This is the eternal rule. Should a person do good, let him do it again and again. Let him find pleasure therein, for blissful is the accumulation of good.”

Dear friends, once again, I would like to congratulate you on the National Unity Day. It is highly symbolic that this holiday was constituted on the initiative of the Interreligious Council in Russia. This is another evidence that Russia’s historical path as a great power has been defined by peaceful, fruitful

cooperation between different peoples and religions.

I would like to wish you success on the path of spiritual service.

I would like to give the floor to Patriarch Kirill of Moscow and All Russia. Please!

Patriarch Kirill: Highly Esteemed Vladimir Vladimirovich,

Dear participants in the meetings and leaders of centralized religious associations in Russia,

I would like to congratulate all of you on the National Unity Day. For us, the Orthodox, it is also a feast of the Kazan Icon of the Mother of God, praying at which were Minin and Pozharsky before entering into a battle with an enemy standing at the walls of the Moscow Kremlin.

This event in itself, lying as it is in the basis of our celebration today was not of a great military importance. And in a certain sense, it was not an event of a considerable political importance. What happened? And what happened is this: the home guards of Minin and Pozharsky repelled from the enemy a part of Moscow - the Kitay-Gorod. It is not even the whole Moscow; it is a district in Moscow.

But why that victory seemingly not so significant in its scale is associated with such a heroic memory? And why that event was laid in the basis of the creation and assertion of so special a veneration of this day by our people as to become a feast of national unity? Well, precisely because this victory at the Moscow Kremlin walls was preceded by something very important.

Indeed, what did the Russian society of that time consist of? There were divisions into parties, clans, various warring groups. A troublesome time, so it was called - the time of trouble, because there was a disturbance in people's heads, which led to a clash with one another. And suddenly those who only yesterday believed to be enemies united in face of the foe, in Kitay-Gorod at the Kremlin walls. This is what we are celebrating.

We celebrate not small and almost unnoticeable historical military victory achieved within one city area; we celebrate a great event - whose who were divided before became united.

And how good it is that in our time, in establishing a holiday of national unity, those who made this decision have given another opportunity for underscoring once again that the true power of our people lies in unity.

It seems to me that in forming this unity today, an important role is played by religious communities

because religions themselves can draw lines of both opposition and even confrontation. Indeed, this used to happen in history. But by God's mercy our people, having endured many internal civic confrontations, have become clearly aware today of the necessity of unity. And religious leaders and their communities are actively involved the preservation and enhancement of this unity.

I would like to wish you, highly esteemed Vladimir Vladimirovich, the leadership of the country and all our people to be always together. Of course, all kinds of things happen in relations between people - nobody has cancelled sympathy and antipathy. But in face of common tasks facing our people today, we should be together; not in trifles or some problems defined by taste, but in that which is important for all our people and for all our country.

Therefore, on this day, we pray especially ardently for the unity of our people. And it is remarkable that we have an opportunity for meeting in order to talk with each other. And once again, by the very fact of our meeting I would like to emphasize our commitment to the unity of our people and to re-affirm our readiness for interreligious interaction and cooperation.

Thank you for your attention.

Vladimir Putin: Thank you, Your Holiness.

The full text of the stenogram is published on the website of the President of Russia.

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