DECR chairman congratulates Patriarch Irinej of Serbia on his 90th birthday

Chairman of the Moscow Patriarchate department for external church relation, Metropolitan Hilarion of Volokolamsk, sent a congratulatory message to the Primate of the Serbian Orthodox Church, Patriarch Irinej, on the occasion of his 90th birthday. The message reads:

Your Holiness,

I cordially congratulate you on your 90th birthday.

Brought up in devotion and motivated by the love of God, from your youth you took the path of the service of the Lord Jesus Christ. Inspired by the example of great Serbian ascetics and present-day confessors of the faith of forefathers, you wholly dedicated yourself to the Holy Church ignoring the dangers involved in the life of the clergy and faithful in those hard times.

By zealous work in the spiritual vineyard of St. Sava of Serbia, you glorified the Lord *in all places of His dominion* (Ps. 102:22), in every important tasks entrusted to you, prominent among them being the leadership of the Theological Seminary of Prizren.

Reverently carrying on the *work of the Lord* (1 Cor. 16:10), you steadfastly came *from strength to strength* (Ps. 84:7) growing in the fulfillment of the commandments of Christ's Gospel and in love among the people of God. Called to the episcopal ministry, you headed the see of the old city of Nis – the earthly homeland of the Holy Emperor Constantine Equal-to-the-Apostles, where the 1700th anniversary of the legalization of Christianity was magnificently celebrated in 2013 with the participation of His Holiness Patriarch Kirill of Moscow and All Russia and Primates of other Local Orthodox Churches.

Ten years ago, Divine Providence elected you to the Patriarchal Throne entrusting to you the destinies of Serbian Orthodoxy at the present difficult and pivotal epoch associated both with the rebirth of the Serbian people and new dramatic challenges.

Maintaining living relationships with the numerous flock, you visit dioceses of the Serbian Patriarchate in the Balkans and far beyond them, support with the inspiring Primatial word your spiritual children who, *in the midst of a very severe trail* (2 Cor. 8:2), are fulfilling the feat of standing for truth at the shrines of forefathers in Kosovo and Montenegro.

The Supreme Authority of the Russian Orthodox Church gives a high value to Your Holiness' outstanding personal contribution to strengthening the unity of the world Orthodoxy and traditionally fraternal relations between our Churches and to your support for the canonical Orthodoxy in Ukraine. With joy we recall Your Holiness' participation in the 1025th anniversary celebrations of the Baptism of Russia, the centenary of restoration of the Russian Patriarchate and the 10th anniversary of the enthronement of His Holiness Patriarch Kirill of Moscow and All Russia. We are also very grateful to you for the worship services celebrated in the Russian church in Belgrade, for your prayer for Russian soldiers buried in the Serbian land, for your paternal care for students from the Moscow Patriarchate who study at the University of Belgrade department of theology.

On this day so significant for you I lift up prayers to God that He may send Your Holiness *joy in the faith* (Phil. 1:25), beneficial strengthening of your physical resources and all-generous help from above in your Patriarchal ministry.

With respectful love in the Lord,

+Metropolitan Hilarion of Volokolamsk

Chairman of the Department for External Church Relations

Moscow Patriarchate

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