



## **Patriarch Kirill meets with Chairman of Cuban State Council and Council of Ministers**



On November 3, 2018, His Holiness Patriarch Kirill of Moscow and All Russia, met with the head of the Republic of Cuba, Chairman of the State Council and Council of Ministers Miguel Mario Diaz-Canel Bermudez.

Mr. Diaz-Canel was accompanied by his spouse Lis Cuesta Peraza; Mr. Ricardo Cabrisas Ruiz, vice-chairman of the Council of Ministers, and other representatives of the Cuban authorities – Minister of Communications Jorge Luis Perdomo Di-Lella; Minister of Energy and Metal Mining Industry Raul Garcia Barreiro; Minister of Industry Alfredo Lopez Valdes; First Deputy Minister of Transportation Eduardo Rodriguez Davila; as well as Luis Alberto Rodriguez Lopez-Calleja, an adviser to the Chairman of the State Council and Council of Ministers; Mr. Rogelio Sierra Diaz, deputy minister of the foreign affairs; and Mr. Gerardo Penalver Portal, Cuban ambassador to Russia.

Participating in the meeting were also Metropolitan Hilarion of Volokolamsk, head of the Moscow Patriarchate department for external church relations, Archpriest Igor Yakimchuk, DECR secretary for

inter-Orthodox relations, and Deacon Andrey Titushkin, DECR secretariat for the far abroad.

Present at the meeting was also A. Guskov, Russian ambassador to Cuba.

Addressing the high guest with words of cordial greeting, His Holiness said, 'I know that it is your first visit outside Latin America, and we appreciate very much that you have made it to Russia'.

Stating that the relations between the two countries, which are over 200 year old, had acquired a special nature after the victory of the revolution in Cuba, His Holiness stressed, 'This warmth in the relations and special sympathy for each other have a continuation today too, when the political situation has changed so much, when the theme of the Cuban revolution no longer defines one hundred percent the sympathy toward Cuba. In our country, there are people who have different political views but the sympathy for Cuba remains the same'.

According to His Holiness, the good attitude of people in Russia to the Cubans is preserved because, among other things, very many people took an active part in the life of Cuba: 'The experience of participation in your struggle, in your life, is handed down from parents to children. For this reason, the Russian society's stable sympathy for Cuba and the Cuban people remains. I would like to say that the Cuban people, too, have preserved good feelings and sympathy towards Russia and the Russian people. I could feel it when I was in Cuba'. As His Holiness noted, he made three visits to the blessed land of Cuba and had an opportunity for close contacts with people, could feel their warm attitude everywhere he went. His Holiness shared his remembrances of the long talk with Fidel Castro during one of his visits to Cuba.

The Primate of the Russian Church also underscored the role of the Orthodox church dedicated to Our Lady of Kazan, which was built in Havana with the direct support of Comandante Fidel Castro. 'Our Russian church has become a center of spiritual and cultural life' he said, 'I know that exhibitions and concerts are held in it, uniting people around this church. About three thousand people are closely connected with it, forming a core of the Russian residents in Havana. These are people of various occupations and ages. I would also like to say that in recent times, very many Russian tourists are coming to Cuba for holidays to enjoy both the climate and beauty of your island'.

His Holiness made a special mention of his visit to Cuba in February 2016. 'I had an opportunity for talking with Mr. Raul Castro on many occasions and for discussing various problems, and every time I felt that he had a great interest in all that is happening in Russia, in the development of Russian-Cuban relations and in the work of the Russian Orthodox Church', he said.

'I would also like to recall my meeting with Pope Francis at the Havana airport', His Holiness continued,

'It was an historic event, the first ever meeting of a Pope of Rome with a Patriarch of Moscow'. His Holiness related what his first words were at that meeting: 'It seems to me that we have met at the right time and at the right place', Patriarch Kirill said at that time.

'Indeed, meeting in Cuba, we were as if far from all the historical conflicts which had taken place in the European continent and which are linked with the tension in the history of relations between the Roman Catholic Church and the Russian Orthodox Church', His Holiness noted, 'It seemed to me that Cuba was an ideal place for the meeting, a completely neutral territory. It is far from Europe and it means from all the historical conflicts. It is neither Orthodox, nor strictly Catholic because the state there is still secular, and a considerable part of the people share the Marxist ideology. As you know, the meeting was a great success as we signed a very important declaration'.

His Holiness thanked Cuba for the conditions, which were created for that historic meetings and stressed again the special feelings that people in Russia have for Cuba. He wished the Cuban people and their leaders God's help and success in solving the problem they face.

'We are deeply moved by the opportunity to meet and talk with you. Thank you for your kind and sincere words for our country and our leaders', Mr. Miguel Diaz-Canel said addressing Patriarch Kirill.

He stressed that he would always remember the visit of His Holiness Patriarch Kirill of Moscow and All Russia to Cuba in February 2016. 'I had an opportunity to meet you. We had a dinner and a talk, of which I have very warm remembrances', the high guest said, 'Together the Army General Raul Castro Ruz, we attended the solemn concert arranged in your honour in the Marti Theatre in Havana and were at the Liturgy you celebrated. During that visit I became deeply aware of the bonds, the history which unite our country with the Russian Orthodox Church'.

Pointing to a great importance that the contacts of His Holiness Patriarch Kirill and Raul Castro had for the development of the existing ties, Miguel Diaz-Canel conveyed to His Holiness warm greetings from Raul Castro.

The Cuban leader also expressed gratitude for the fact that precisely Havana was chosen for the historic meeting between the Patriarch of Moscow and All Russia and the Pope of Rome. 'The conception of the visit made public before and during the visit, whereby Cuba was seen as a crossroad of many various traditions, is relevant to this day', he stressed, and 'we are grateful for this approach and will follow this conception. Therefore, we exert so much effort for the sake of peace in Latin America. Thank you for your confidence in us'.

The Chairman of the State Council also thanked Patriarch Kirill for his congratulations on his election to

the high post.

'This last February, we were very pleased to mark the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the church of Our Lady of Kazan in Havana' Mr. Bermudez said, 'It seems that little time has passed since but now it is already the tenth anniversary since the foundation of this church. We have to admit its role as a center of cultural attraction, as an important factor for uniting Russians who live in Cuba and its importance for the Cubans who adhere to this faith. As you noted, the legacy of the Commander-in-Chief Fidel Castro Ruz is also present there. Our responsibility is to continue this legacy so that the church may work fruitfully'.

'I believe the both sides can express satisfaction at the present level of development in the relations between Cuba and the Moscow Patriarchate. We share our common values', Mr. Miguel Diaz-Canel said, 'I would like to assure you that we will work to maintain and strengthen these relations'.

*DECR Communication Service*

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