His Holiness Patriarch Kirill meets with the head of the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church



On 17 May 2018, the feast of the Ascension of the Lord, after the Divine Liturgy His Holiness Patriarch Kirill of Moscow and All Russia met with the head of the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church, His Holiness Patriarch and Catholicos Abune Mathias I.

Taking part in the meeting which took place in the Red Hall of the Cathedral of Christ the Saviour in Moscow, were also members of the official delegation of the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church: Abune Enthons, Archbishop of West Harerge Diocese; Abune Philipos, Bishop of South Omo Diocese; Abune Aregawi, Bishop of South Gonder Diocese; Melake Genet Abba Kidane Mariam, personal assistant to His Holiness Abune Mathias I; Melake Selam Abba Kiross Weldeab, head of the Media Service; and Musie Hailu, head of the Service of the Patriarchal Protocol.

The Russian Orthodox Church was also represented by Metropolitan Hilarion of Volokolamsk, chairman of the Department for External Church Relations (DECR); Archimandrite Philaret (Bulekov), DECR vice-

chairman; Hieromonk Stephan (Igumnov), DECR secretary for inter-Christian relations; Hieromonk Ioann (Kopeykin), pro-rector of the Ss. Cyril and Methodius Theological Institute for Post-Graduate Studies; and Mr. Vakhtang Kipshidze, vice-chairman of the Synodal Department for Church's Relations with Society and Mass Media.

Greeting cordially the high guest and the delegation that accompanied him, His Holiness Patriarch Kirill said in particular, "It is your first visit to our Church, to our country. You have an opportunity to learn about the religious life of our people. The last time the head of the Ethiopian Church visited us 22 years ago, in 1996. It was Abune Paulos, your predecessor of blessed memory. I also recall the visit of His Holiness Patriarch Tekle Haimanot in 1978 and the visit of His Holiness Patriarch Pimen of Moscow and All Russia to Ethiopia in 1974."

As His Holiness noted, he cherishes the memory of his first visit to the far-off African country in 1971. "At the time the Central Committee of the World Council of Churches held its session in Addis Ababa. I participated in that meeting and, of course, could visit the local churches," he added.

"The ties between our peoples have deep historical roots," the Primate of the Russian Orthodox Church also said, noting that Patriarch and Catholicos Abune Mathias is visiting Russia in the year marking the 120th anniversary of the establishment of official diplomatic relations between the states of Russia and Ethiopia. "We have always shown special interest in the life of the Ethiopian Church, with open heart receiving your students and your delegations in the 1970s and later co-suffering with you because of the hardships that your Church and your people were enduring. And today we rejoice with you seeing the prosperity of the Ethiopian Church and your success."

During the meeting, His Holiness Patriarch Kirill of Moscow and All Russia mentioned the situation in North Africa and the Middle East and the plight of the Christian communities there. "It is absolutely obvious that it is Christians who suffer most in this region. Terrorists' agents are very active there, and Christians become their victims." His Holiness said.

"We know that your faithful also fell victim to terror," Patriarch Kirill added, addressing Patriarch and Catholicos Abune Mathias, "The whole world was shocked when in April 2015 a video was released of the brutal massacre of Christians of the Ethiopian Church on the shore of the Mediterranean Sea in Libya. As you know, several months earlier the faithful of the Coptic Church also died as martyrs."

Christians have become the most persecuted religious community in the world, the Primate of the Russian Orthodox Church emphasized.

"It would seem that countries within the Christian tradition ought to combine their efforts to set up a

barrier to such dreadful phenomenon as terrorism. However, the contradictions between the great powers only deepen, and the relationships between the countries with common Christian historical background are, regrettably, not very good," His Holiness said.

In this regard, mentioning the latest developments in Syria, His Holiness also said, "The United States and Russia have never before been in such close contact in the territory where both sides are involved in the hostilities. I had a feeling that we were approaching a very dangerous moment in history, because even an accidental collision of the two powers could lead to a nuclear war which would destroy the human civilization. Then I decided to come into contact with Pope Francis. We agreed to meet. I believe that the declaration that we signed is of great importance."

His Holiness Patriarch Kirill expressed his opinion that the Christian Churches and communities must combine their efforts to work out common approaches to the problem of terrorism and, in particular, to such terrible phenomenon as genocide of the Christian population.

During the meeting, His Holiness also raised the topic of theological dialogue between the Orthodox Church and the Oriental Churches and the bilateral relations between the Moscow Patriarchate and the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church, such as church-society relations, social ministry, diaconia, and missionary activities. "It would also be beneficial to revive contacts between our theological educational institutions," His Holiness added, "We are ready to invite your students to study in Russia."

His Holiness Patriarch and Catholicos Abune Mathias I thanked His Holiness Patriarch Kirill for the invitation to visit the Russian Church and for the warm hospitality and noted that his visit was aimed at intensifying relationships between the two Churches.

Patriarch and Catholicos Abune Mathias expressed his interest in promoting cooperation in the educational sphere. As he noted, many Ethiopian students studied in Russia, and some of them later became bishops and archbishops, performing their archpastoral ministry in Ethiopia.

The head of the Ethiopian Church's delegation told about the difficult situation of the African Churches, with extremists attacking church buildings, and with terrorists killing people, both Christians and Muslims who refuse to accept their ideology.

Noting the complexity and danger of the problem of terrorism, the Ethiopian Patriarch expressed his opinion that Christians ought to show solidarity in addressing this problem.

As the result of the meeting, a joint communiqué was adopted, containing a proposal to present to the attention of the Synods of the Russian Orthodox Church and the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church

an issue of establishing a bilateral commission for dialogue.

DECR Communication Service/

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