Interreligious delegation from Russia holds meetings with Syrian state leaders



February 6, 2018 – the delegation of the interreligious working group of the Russian Presidential Council for Cooperation with Religious Associations, who are in Syria on a humanitarian mission, held several meetings with Syrian state high officials.

With a blessing of His Holiness Patriarch Kirill of Moscow and All Russia and by the decision of the head of the Moscow Patriarchate department for external church relations (DECR), Metropolitan Hilarion of Volokolamsk, the delegation is led by DECR secretary for inter-Christian relations Hieromonk Stephen (Igumnov). It includes Mr. S Melnikov, executive secretary of the Presidential Council for Cooperation with Religious Associations, Ildar Ziganshin, member of the Presidium of the Central Muslim Board in Russia; Mufti Albir Krganov, chairman of the Muslim Assembly of Russia; Ahmad Kakhaev, first vice-chairman of the Central Muslim Board in the Republic of Dagestan; Rev. S. Ryakhovsky, Presiding

Bishop of the Russian Union of Christian of the Evangelical Faith; Archimandrite Pogos Vardanian, vicar of the head of the diocese of Russia and Novo-Nakhichevan of the Armenian Apostolic Church; Hieromonk Yermogen (Korchukov), executive director of the Interreligious Foundation for Joint Humanitarian Projects; Mr. S. Baidakov, chairman of the Moscow branch of the Imperial Orthodox Palestine Society; Ms. N. Kuskova, co-chair of the Committee for Solidarity with the People of Libya and Syria; Mr. M. Mirsayapov, head of the international department of the Muslim Assembly in Russia; Mr. A. Tashtimirov, member of the Central Muslim Board in Russia; Mr. O. Fomin, co-chairman of the Committee for Solidarity with the People of Libya and Syria; and Mr. Kh. Nasralla, chairman of the Arab Diaspora, as well as representatives of Russian TV channels and news agencies.

In the morning, the delegation visited the historic Umayyad Mosque in downtown Damascus. They venerated the honourable head of the holy prophet John the Precursor and Baptist of the Lord. They also visited the nearby burial place of Sultan Salah ad-Din with the adjacent grave of Sheikh Tawfiq Ramadan Al-Bouti, an outstanding Islamic theologian and spiritual leader of the Muslims, the peacemaker who was assassinated a few years ago by terrorists during his preaching at one of the mosques in Damascus. The leaders of the Umayyad Mosque compound presented the Russian delegation with a special commemorative medal for honorary guests. It was noted that it was done in recognition of the large scale of the humanitarian action carried out in previous days.

After that, the Russian guests were received in the Government House by Syrian Prime Minister Imad Khamis, who in the very beginning of the meeting expressed very warm words of gratitude to President Putin for his decisive role in liberating Syria from terrorists. Mr. Khamis gave a high value to the role of the Russian Orthodox Church and personally His Holiness Patriarch Kirill of Moscow and All Russia in organizing and developing various projects for aid to the Syrian people. He also asked to convey words of gratitude from the Syrians to all the believers in Russia whose donations allowed collecting a record-setting amount of humanitarian aid brought to Syria by the delegation of the Interreligious Working Group.

Greeting the head of the Syrian government on behalf of the delegation, Hieromonk Stephen noted that the representatives of religious communities in Russia came to Syria not only to distribute humanitarian aid but also to express solidarity of all the Russian people with their Syrian brothers and sisters. ‘The result of the struggle waged by the Syrian people against terrorists all these years, with Russia’s decisive support is significant not only for Syria but also for the whole world. The age-long brotherhood of the peoples of Russia and Syria has been strengthened in the last years by the common blood shed by their sons and daughters. Now that the victory over the major terrorist forces is gained, the time has come to engage in the restoration of the country. The Russian Orthodox Church and other religious communities in Russia together with Christian and Muslim leaders in Syria will continue strengthening the fraternal ties between the two nations by concrete works of charity’, he said.

Then the Russian delegation met with Syrian deputy foreign minister Mr. F. Mikdad; minister for regional affairs O. I. Galawandji; and minister of labour and social development Ms. Rima al-Kadri. The sides exchanged opinions on the current humanitarian situation in the country and the beginning of the process of national Syrian dialogue in Sochi. The participation of a representative delegation of the Syrian Christian and Muslim clergy in the Sochi congress and the attendance of the Russian Orthodox Church as an observer were stressed as important. Ms. Rima al-Kadri informed the delegation about projects realized by her department for restoring the ruined infrastructure in Syria and for aid to its suffering people.

After their meetings with the Syrian government ministers, the delegation visited the Parliament – the People's Council of the Syrian Arab Republic, where they met with its speaker Mr Hammoudeh al-Sabbagh and representatives of various fractions. Syrian deputies noted that it was for the first time that so representative a delegation of Christian and Muslim communities came to Syria and that the very fact of this visit has a great importance for the restoration of peace in Syria.

The visit of the interreligious delegation from Russia has attracted a broad attention of the Arab mass media. It members gave numerous interviews in intervals between meetings and held briefings to inform the mass media about the aims and tasks of their visit.

DECR Communication Service

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