



## **DECR chairman meets with representatives of Syrian opposition's High Negotiation Committee**



January 24, 2018 – A meeting took place at the Moscow Patriarchate department for external church relations (DECR) between DECR chairman Metropolitan Hilarion and members of a delegation representing the Syrian opposition's High Negotiation Committee, who have arrived in Moscow to take part in several meetings and consultations held in connection with the of Syrian National Dialogue Congress prepared to be held in the end of January in Sochi. The delegation includes vice-chairmen of the committee Jamal Suleiman and Khaled al-Mahamid and Hind Kabawat, member of the committee.

Participating in the meeting from the DECR were Hieromonk Stephan (Igumnov), secretary for inter-Christian relations, Rev. Dimity Safonov, secretary for interreligious relations, Deacon Andrey Titushkin, office for the far abroad, and I. Kashitsyn, secretariat for interreligious relations.

Addressing the guests, Metropolitan Hilarion said, 'I am glad to meet you at the Department for External Church Relations, which is often called the Church's ministry of foreign affairs. I have been to your

country on several occasions and remember the peaceful and good atmosphere that reigned in Syria before the armed conflict began. I remember how Christians and Muslims used to live in peace and harmony’.

Throughout the Syrian crisis the Russian Orthodox Church has closely followed the development in the country, among other things because there is a considerable number of Christians living in Syria, the DECR chairman noted. ‘Since the moment when terrorists began to seize Syrian territories, the fate of Christians has become very tragic. Many Christian settlements have been virtually annihilated and shrines destroyed or defiled. Many thousands of Christians have had to leave the Syrian land, some for good, others, we hope, will be able to return’.

His Eminence said that now as the major terrorist forces have been driven away from the Syrian territory thanks, in the first place, to the support of the Russian Army, it is possible and necessary to begin thinking about a gradual restoration of the country. What is needed for it is a political settlement, as well as a tremendous humanitarian work to restore the destroyed infrastructure. ‘For us as representatives of the Russian Orthodox Church it is especially urgent that Syrian Christians could return to their homes’, he continued, ‘and what is necessary for it is for them to be given guarantees of security. It is also necessary to restore the destroyed houses and shrines. Our Church is ready to do all that is possible for her to achieve it’.

Mr. Khaled al-Mahamid thanked Metropolitan Hilarion for the readiness to meet and for the warm welcome and said, ‘Our delegation has come to Russia at the invitation of the Russian Federation Ministry of Foreign Affairs. For us it is important to conduct dialogue with all parties and to understand how to settle the present conflict’.

He also said that in the course of the visit to Russia, the delegation had several meetings including with Russian Minister of Foreign Affairs Sergey Lavrov and representatives of the Council of the Federation and the State Duma. ‘And now we are with you and we are glad that you have been to our country and seen with your own eyes what took place there before the conflict. We appreciate Russia’s role, her desire to find a political settlement of the Syrian crisis, as well as her actions to struggle with terrorism in our country. The presence of Russian armed forces in the territory of Syria is a guarantee of the democratic development of our country and observance of the rights of all people’, he said.

Then the participants in the meeting exchanged their views on various aspects of the settlement of the situation in Syria.

Addressing his interlocutors in the conclusion of the meeting, Metropolitan Hilarion stressed, ‘We want the now necessary gigantic work to restore the Syrian infrastructure, to normalize people’s life, to bring

back refugees to begin as soon as possible. It is important that all the sides within the Syrian conflict should take part in it'.

*DECR Communication Service*

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