Briefing on situation around former Metropolitan Philaret of Kiev's appeal

December 1, 2017 – During a break between sessions of the Bishops' Council of the Russian Orthodox Church, Metropolitan Hilarion of Volokolamsk, head of the Moscow Patriarchate department for external church relations (DECR), and Archbishop Clement of Irpen, head of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church's synodal information department, answered questions from mass media reporters at the Council's media center. The briefing was moderated by Rev. Alexander Volkov, head of the Patriarchal Press Service.

Mass media reporters were interested in particular in whether a meeting between His Holiness Patriarch Kirill and former Metropolitan Philaret was planned. 'Such a meeting is not planned for the time being', Metropolitan Hilarion informed them, 'On our part, we have set up a commission for conducting negotiations with the structure headed by former Metropolitan Philaret of Kiev and All Ukraine. If these negotiations are successful we will certainly be able to think about further step as well'.

Answering the question from Interfax news agency about why the word 'pardon', which had been used

by the agency in its report about the letter of former Metropolitan Philaret, is incorrect and cannot be regarded as belonging to the church lexicon, the DECR chairman stressed that 'The official church lexicon should be familiarized with through official texts published by the Church. When the aim is to create a sensation or provoke a discussion, these texts are supplemented with certain overtones or some terms that are absent from these texts, thus inflicting damage and harm on the Church's cause'.

'I would like to express my protest to Interfax news agency against the provocative publication which appeared late night yesterday and provoked a very indignant reaction in Ukraine, because no pardon whatsoever was mentioned in either the letter from former Metropolitan Philaret of Kiev or the resolution of the Russian Orthodox Church', the archpastor continued, 'Pardon is a term from the juridical and judicial lexicon; for instance, criminals appeal for pardon to a President. There was nothing of the kind since what was there was a call to take measures for restoring unity and a request for forgiveness. It is this request to which the Bishops' Council responded. I am very much regret that Interfax agency so unprofessionally and incorrectly communicated what actually did not exist in either the letter or the response to it by the Bishops' Council. I would very much hope that in future more professionalism will be shown in communicating what happened in actual fact'.

On his part, Archbishop Clement of Irpen added, 'The above-mentioned publication has provoked a considerable response not only in the mass media, which claim to be part of the so-called Kiev Patriarchate, but also in the non-church press, which has often proved to know nothing about fine points, nor to understand them. For this reason, almost the whole day yesterday evening till the late night negative responses came from many of those who were involved in the process we are talking about today. It is very important to remember that unfortunately the division, the schism existing in Ukraine today has a very long history: for 25 years now the church unity has been absent because of enmity, accusations and confrontation. And it is very important now to find a possibility for stepping over mutual accusations and reproaches, for removing all the hate rhetoric from our discourse in order to open a way for settling this difficult problem which has inflicted suffering literally on millions of believers living in Ukraine'.

His Eminence Clement also commented on the statements made by representatives of the structure headed by former Metropolitan Philaret that the letter allegedly does not concern a desire to restore the church unity but the readiness for dialogue about autocephaly. 'I would refer directly to the primary source, that is, the text conveyed to the Bishops' Council and the Patriarch of Moscow. In this text, both I and I believe all the rest see not a single word about autocephaly but the point is precisely the restoration of the Eucharistic, that is, church unity. It is only in this way that it is possible to treat the document which has been received and considered by the Bishops' Council', the archpastor said.

Continuing the subject, Metropolitan Hilarion noted, 'According to my feeling, which I get from the brief

communication I had with representatives of this structure, there are many different tendencies in the so-called Kiev Patriarchate itself. There are those who have taken a very explicit autocephalic stand; for them there is no other subject for discussion except for the recognition of autocephaly. There are those who are set for a more constructive dialogue. I think, if we now set up commissions for dialogue on the both sides, its beginning is possible only if we do not lay down any preconditions. We should hear each other in the course of this dialogue, try to collate our positions and understand whether we can move on or not. But now any discussion in the public space on any preconditions for dialogue can prevent it from beginning. By the way, I said that to those who brought the letter over here from former Metropolitan Philaret of Kiev'.

Journalists were also interested in the way in which the letter got to Moscow. Metropolitan Hilarion clarified that the message was brought over by former Metropolitan Philaret's envoys. 'Contrary to statements made in Kiev now, it was not our initiative, but that of the representatives of the letter's author himself', His Eminence stated, 'They addressed us first through their representatives in America and only after that directly us'.

'I met with them. The letter was conveyed, and since it was addressed not only to His Holiness Patriarch Kirill but also to the whole episcopate of the Russian Orthodox Church, it is only natural that it was read out at the Bishops' Council', the DECR chairman noted stressing that the response to this letter was given by the Resolution of the Bishops' Council 'On the appeal of former Metropolitan Philaret of Kiev and All Ukraine', which was adopted last evening.

Bishops' Council information service

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