HIS HOLINESS PATRIARCH KIRILL: "THE MEETING ON CUBA WAS AN IMPORTANT STEP ON THE WAY TO RESOLVING THE MORE RELEVANT ISSUES OF THE MODERN-DAY WORLD BY THE JOINT EFFORTS OF THE TWO LARGEST CHURCHES OF THE CHRISTIAN WORLD"

Recent years have been marked by a development in the cooperation between the Russian Orthodox Church and the Roman Catholic Church in the sphere of social problems, noted His Holiness Patriarch Kirill in his presentation at the Episcopal Council taking place in Moscow.

"A high degree of mutual understanding was shown during the course of my meeting with Pope Francis on the 12th February 2016 in Havana," said His Holiness, noting that in Russia and throughout the world this event had a broad positive resonance. The Patriarch expressed his belief that the meeting on Cuba would become an important step on the way to resolving the more relevant issues of the modern-day world by the joint efforts of the two largest Churches of the Christian world.

His Holiness the Patriarch reminded his listeners that the main reason for organizing the meeting on Cuba was the tragic situation in which Christians in the Middle East and North Africa had found themselves. The Episcopal Council in February 2016 resolved "to do all that is possible that the genocide directed at Christians by extremists, who sacrilegiously justify their evil deeds with religious slogans, be halted," and called upon 2016 to be the year of special efforts undertaken in this direction."

"The meeting in Havana became a concrete and genuine step towards carrying out this decision," His Holiness Patriarch Kirill testified. "The joint declaration which Pope Francis and I signed at the end of our meeting contains a call to the world community to do all that is possible for an end to violence in the Middle East, which is impossible to achieve without the coordinated action of all forces opposed to extremism." The First Hierarch of the Russian Church especially noted that soon after this joint appeal the tragedy in the Syria began to be called a genocide in the West. For example, similar declarations were made by the State Department and the US Congress.

"The time has come to think seriously on how to solve the problems which Syria will encounter after peace has been restored in the country. A most important issue is the creation of conditions for a life of security for Christians and the return of refugees. Destroyed church have to be restored, as well as the infrastructure and living accommodation," His Holiness the Patriarch reminded listeners, noting that the

Russian Orthodox Church was taking all measures to help this process.

He spoke of how a concrete step in developing the Orthodox-Catholic interaction in this field was the visit by a group of representatives of the Russian Orthodox Church and the Roman Catholic Church to Lebanon and Syria in April of 2016. “The consultations held during the visit with the representatives of the local religious confessions ought to serve as the basis for developing further joint projects aimed at supporting our brothers and sisters who are enduring hardships,” His Holiness testified.

In heeding the call which was expressed at the meeting in Havana, in 2017 Orthodox and Catholics organized a number of joint events in defense of Christians of the Middle East. Thus, in January of 2017 in Paris there was the V European Orthodox –Catholic Forum dedicated to the problem of the threat of terrorism directly linked to the situation in the Middle East and which concerns everyone today without exception. In its final document the forum’s participants spoke of the need for close cooperation between Orthodox and Catholics when confronted by the hitherto unforeseen challenges which the modern-day world is experiencing, expressed their solidarity with the suffering Christians of the Middle east, Africa and Asia and condemned all forms of discrimination on religious grounds.

An important event was the World Summit in Defense of Persecuted Christians in May of this year in the US capital Washington and which brought together 600 delegates from 136 countries. The summit was organized thanks to the joint initiative of the Russian Orthodox Church and the Evangelical Association of Billy Graham. Representatives of the Local Orthodox Churches, the Roman Catholic Church, various Protestant denominations, as well as the ancient Oriental Churches, were invited to participate in it. A most active part in the summit was taken by the Archbishop of Washington Cardinal Donald Wuerl and representatives of the Papal Council on Christian Unity.

In March of 2017 the Commission for International Cooperation under the Presidential Council for the Interaction with the Religious Organizations of Russia adopted a resolution on the setting up of a special working group to coordinate the activities of Russian religious communities in the cause of rendering aid to the population of Syria. The Christian and Muslim communities of Russia, including the Russian Orthodox Church and the Roman Catholic Church, will combine their efforts in collecting things essential for the suffering population of Syria.

An important place in the joint declaration signed by Patriarch Kirill of Moscow and All Russia and Pope Francis is occupied by the call to active peace-making and public solidarity in Ukraine. “Both the hierarchy of the Orthodox Church and the Holy See have repeatedly stressed that the only means of resolving the conflict in Ukraine is by implementing the Minsk accords,” His Holiness Patriarch Kirill

reminded listeners. “An important prerequisite for achieving inter-confessional peace in Ukraine was the declaration on the topic that the Unia is not the means of attaining unity between the Churches and that proselytism is unacceptable in any form in Orthodox-Catholic relations. For the first time in history the Unia was evaluated in this manner not only by the Orthodox side, but also on the part of the head of the Roman Catholic Church.”

The Patriarch also mentioned with gratitude the support towards the Ukrainian Orthodox Church on behalf of the Papal See, expressed in the condemnation of the laws no.4128 and no.4511 which are discriminatory in relation to the largest Christian community in the Ukraine and the drafts of which have already been discussed by the Supreme Rada.

Finally, a positive result of the meeting in Havana was the unprecedented event of the bringing from Bari to Moscow and St. Petersburg in May and June of 2017 a part of the relics of St. Nicholas the Wonderworker. “It is only thanks to the agreement reached at the Havana meeting that it was possible to bring to Russia the relics of St. Nicholas the Wonderworker, which have never left Bari for 930 years,” the First Hierarch of the Russian Orthodox Church noted, reminding listeners that throughout the two months that the venerable relics were in Moscow and St. Petersburg millions of believers from Russia, Belorussia, Moldova and other countries were able to venerate them.

Source: https://mospat.ru/en/news/47946/