His Holiness Patriarch Kirill meets with President of the Appeal of Conscience Foundation

On 21 November 2017, His Holiness Patriarch Kirill of Moscow and All Russia, met with Rabbi Arthur Schneier, President of the Appeal of Conscience Foundation, USA.

Taking part in the meeting, which was held at the Patriarchal and Synodal residence in St. Daniel's Monastery in Moscow, were Archimandrite Philaret (Bulekov), DECR vice-chairman; Rev. Dimitry Safonov, DECR secretary for inter-religious relations; the Foundations' secretary-treasurer Steven J.Dorn, and Mrs Elizabeth Schneier, the wife of the rabbi.

His Holiness warmly greeted the guests and said that he and Rabbi Schneier had been acquainted for over forty years. "During these years we worked together, elaborating many topics in a difficult political context. The cold war between East and West, strong confrontation, the danger of a nuclear conflict… At that time we were building bridges, including those between the Soviet Union and the United States of America."

His Holiness mentioned his recent meeting with the newly appointed Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of the USA to the Russian Federation, Jon Huntsman: "I told him about our work during the cold war, when a religious factor was one of the most important that helped to maintain good relations among nations irrespective of political relations among the states. Most certainly, the Appeal of Conscience Foundation was a very significant platform for such dialogue."

His Holiness continued to say, "At present time people are confronted with new difficulties, new problems, and new challenges. I believe that there are many like-minded people with the Russian Orthodox Church who share her thoughts, but there those who do not. In this sense one may say that the border runs through the United States as well as though Russia. There are people in both countries who deny the meaning of moral values, renounce the institute of marriage and family and insist on a system of education that would ruin the moral sense of children. These borders run between good and evil, and it is very important for religious people to stand on the same side.

"Our cooperation with traditional; religions seems to be even more successful than our relations with certain Christian Protestant denominations. We feel it in our work at the Interreligious Council of Russia. The Orthodox, the Jews, the Muslims and the Buddhists are close in their understanding of the fundamental moral problems that exist in the world today. We are optimistic as we see that the believers have united as far as these problems are concerned. I believe that we should work actively and

strengthen cooperation of people who remain faithful to the Biblical principles. Common response to the challenges of the contemporary world opens new prospects in the inter-religious dialogue."

In 2013 the Council of European Bishops' Conferences and the Appeal of Conscience Foundation signed a joint declaration in defense of the persecuted Christians and other religious minorities. His Holiness believes that it remains meaningful today and that common struggle for Christian presence in the Middle East must be a priority of the interreligious cooperation.

The Primate of the Russian Orthodox Church mentioned his visit to Iraq in 2002, two weeks before the American troops entered the country. 'I visited Mosul in the north, where 1,5 million Christians lived, saw monasteries of the 4th century with monastic communities and was surprised at how rich the religious life was. There were no conflicts with the Muslims. There are only 150 thousand Christians in Iraq at present. Where are the others? They have either died or left the country. Churches and monasteries were destroyed."

His Holiness shared his reminiscences of his visit to the Orthodox Church of Antioch in 2014, of his talks with people I the streets of Damascus and with the Syrian religious leaders.

Rabbi Arthur Schneier noted that "interreligious cooperation helps advance mutual understanding, respect for human dignity, quality of life and respond to natural disasters and peaceful co-existence." At a time of misuse and abuse of religion, it is necessary to underscore that "a crime committed in the name of religion is the greatest crime against religion." Rabbi Schneier added: "The Appeal of Conscience Foundation has successfully created opportunities for faith communities to work together across the globe to support one another and to meet the social welfare and humanitarian needs of their respective communities."

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