Patriarch Kirill's address to 137th Assembly of Inter-Parliamentary Union

The 147th Assembly of the Inter-Parliamentary Union took place from October 14-18, 2017, in St. Petersburg. His Holiness Kirill, Patriarch of Moscow and All Russia, addressed it on October 16.

"Dear Parliamentarians:

Thank you for inviting me to this high assembly. For more than one year the Russian Orthodox Church has maintained open and motivated dialogue with parliament members in many states in which there are our dioceses and parishes. It happens in Russia, Ukraine and Belarus and in other countries of canonical responsibility of the Moscow Patriarchate, as well as other states in which our Church carries out its service.

I would like right away to indicate the main topic of my today's address: it is the need to search for an ethical consensus in today's world and to establish justice on its basis. Certainly, in the first place this topic is an extremely worrisome problem for me as a patriarch, a priest. At the same time, it is my conviction that an ethical consensus is the only possible basis, the only possible universal foundation for a peaceful coexistence of different cultures and nations in today's world – a world that is intricate, unstable and unpredictable.

You remember how in the last century early 90s when the bipolar system of international relations collapsed, many predicted that 'a wonderful new world' is just about to come. It will be a stable, predictable, safe and highly sustainable. This future was bound up with the apparent victory of universal values. Thanks to Francis Fukuyama, an 'end of history' was proclaimed as the endpoint of socio-cultural development of humanity, which seemed to reach the summit and its further life was to consist only in propagation of universal liberal values throughout the world and their inevitable triumph.

However, the last decade of the 20th century and the ending second decade of the 21st century have shown that the values which have been asserted as basic, universal and the only possible source of humanity's happiness have not stand the test of time. The world, alas, has not become either peaceful or predictable or more stable.

At the same time, in the continued search for a basis for stability in the same years, what has become visible in the life of many countries and in international relations are quite definite tendencies of the growing role of traditional religions both in social and cultural fields, which is conditioned by both the

fundamental nature of religion and people's desire to preserve the moral basis of societal life.

For a long time and to a considerable extent today too, the legislative work has continued to relate to the moral principles laid by the Creator into human nature. In today's world, however, attempts have often been made to ignore this relation. It inevitably leads to discussion on the relationships between morality, justice and law, to discussion on the values lying at the basis of the social development of the free world today.

You represent parliaments of the world, and your principal task is to negotiate various and often different interests and to establish justice in the form of law. But what can justice be? For the Greek and Romans this notion was personified in goddesses Femida and Justicia respectively. And today, *justice* in English is often seen exclusively as literary observance of standard legal norms to be observed also in court.

However, there is also an Old Greek notion of Δικαιοσύνη, which also means 'justice', 'righteousness'. And it is a very important interpretation pointing again and again to the organic relationship between justice and morality, righteousness. The etymology of the Russian word *spravedlivist* also refers to the notion of divine Truth.

It is impossible to harmonize interests within a state, the more so on the international arena, if justice is separated from the deep, time-tested moral foundation. The moral postulates, moral norms preserved both by the very human nature and religions throughout millennia are not at all a restriction of human freedom. It is not an excuse for trampling upon the rights of the individual. It is our conviction that a person cannot live in peace, tranquility and happiness if a socium has no common moral values supported by society and state in all possible ways. Freedom as a value cannot be realized without responsibility assumed by the free man. This choice can be linked with various religious outlooks but it is always determined by the universal moral imperative.

In many countries today, values are conceived in politico-philosophical terms, sometimes torn away from the national cultural-historical context. And while the above-mentioned concept of the 'end of history' has gone to the periphery of academic and expert discussion, in some societies these political values are declared as the ideal and universal at that. If it is so, they are to be spread to the whole world in their existing form and without consideration for the cultural and historical peculiarities of diverse countries and societies. For instance, people are told: there is a value of human freedom. Yes, there is and it is indisputable. But national parliaments tend to have less and less legal possibilities to define the content of this value freely, without being subjected to external pressure or revision by the political systems that claim to be the ultimate authority.

You represent over one hundred fifty national legislative institutions. And each enjoys its own traditions

and identity to be respected. That is why your contacts with one another are of interest to you. You are different and in this lies your richness. But if the Inter-parliamentary Union is turned into a uniform parliament, then it is be equally far from the aspirations and expectations of the nations represented here. And it will never be able to help express and fix as law the norms that could really serve for the happiness of each individual.

At the same time, for all the differences in cultures, nations, establishments, we all have the moral sense and each has the voice of conscience. In other words, our diversity is super-structural, to use once popular terminology. And the moral sense is the true basis; it is really a universal attribute of the human nature with which we are born. It is not constructed by someone who invented 'authentic universal values' as something which can be corrected or 'improved' at any time to please particular political, ideological or even financial and economic interests. The value of human personality is universal not because an individual is an abstraction and there are norms of negotiated rational morality. No. In the ethical teaching of different religious traditions we see a coincidence, an appeal to human conscience, which we as Christians call God's voice in our hearts. The axiomatics of world religions differ and their dogmatic teachings are different but as soon as we turn to the moral level, as soon as we start talking about the necessary basic conditions for peaceful human life for all, different religious traditions demonstrate moral consensus. It is not without reason that it is commonly accepted to speak of 'the golden rule of morality', which in the Gospel's language reads, *Do to others as you would have them do to you* (Lk. 6:31). It is on this profound experience, in our view, that the possibility for a moral consensus for humanity is based.

I will give you this example. In the culture of all peoples, there is a notion of positive hero. In arts, in literature, in cinematography, an evildoer cannot be an example for emulation. Even where a malicious hero is presented attractively, the forces of goodness still win while he fails and is to be regretted at best. This also reflects the unity of the human moral nature. And this moral nature should be safeguarded by all – religion, education and legislation.

Moral imperatives have direct impact on the life of not only each individual but also societies, states and international relations. There are no grounds whatsoever to believe that the conscience of an individual and motivation of his actions do not signify and that it is of no one's concern outside of one's private life. Allegedly, the most important thing is one's observance of law while everything else is secondary.

It is my conviction that the true value of law is revealed only when it rests upon the human moral sense, when the demands of law coincide with the human voice of conscience. A law that has lost its link with the human moral nature does not provoke a response in the heart, becoming useless or even harmful for human society. Such a law can begin safeguarding vices and lead eventually to the moral degradation of a society. We remember how in our county in the last century attempts were made to create a 'new

man' by replacing moral norms with norms of ideological expediency vested as laws. Regrettably, the ideas of improving man in accordance with an ideology have not died. And today the separation of law from morality leads to what has happened for the first time in human history as what traditionally was believed to be a violation of moral ascertainment has become a norm of law. And this is indeed also a result of recognition of ideological values as universal instead of recognition of the substantial value of the moral basis.

It is the common values alone, as resting on human conscience impossible to be ideologized or politicized, that can constitute the moral consensus of humanity. In interreligious dialogue, representatives of various traditions discern the universal moral value, overcome distrust, oppose radicalism together and advocate their position on issues having a moral dimension.

My meeting with Pope Francis of Rome in February 2016 has become an example of the unity of attitudes to the traditional family, to the struggle with terrorism and pseudo-religious extremism. We came out together against the persecution of Christians in the Middle East and North Africa. This meeting, as well as the reaction to it from political and public leaders, has demonstrated in practice both the need and possibility for common moral consensus in today's world.

We continue our contacts with Protestant denominations and the World Council of Churches with whom we have maintained cooperation on many problems of peacemaking and settling regional conflicts for several decades.

We continue our dialogue with Moslem communities in various countries, called as wellr to fortify our common moral values, confidence and friendship.

In a lively response of our whole Church to the humanitarian situation in Syria, our parishioners organized the collection and deliverance of aid to people in that country, both Christians and people of other communities.

It is the moral imperative that has guided the participation of our Church in the settlement of the Karabakh problem, in which Christian leaders in Armenia and Moslem leaders in Azerbaijan participate on equal footing. In the beginning of September 2017, a trilateral meeting of religious leaders of our countries took place in Moscow to consider this problem. As a result, a document was signed stating the need to change the very perception of the problem. This meeting was a testimony to the peacemaking potential of religions, which helps us overcome differences difficult to overcome at a different gathering.

The Russian Orthodox Church has taken a peacemaking stand with regard to the civic conflict in Ukraine, too, by consistent advocacy for national reconciliation and rejection of enmity and violence.

Attempts are made to involve the Church in the confrontation, to make it take a particular side. But the Church has pursued consistently and firmly the policy aimed at putting an end to the confrontation in the society. For the umpteenth time I will state that there is no force in the Ukrainian society other than the canonical Ukrainian Orthodox Church that could become the basis for settling the conflict.

And here, while regretting the absence of the Ukrainian parliament members at this meeting, I cannot but mention the continued legislative attempts in Ukraine to discriminate against the Ukrainian Orthodox Church only because of its canonical relations with the Moscow Patriarchate. The proposed laws lobbied by radical circles will create legal conditions for bureaucratic interference in the internal affairs of parishes and dioceses and provoke an even greater religious schism in the Ukrainian society. As the grandiose procession with the cross for peace in Ukraine has shown, the Orthodox Church in that country stands exclusively for internal national peace, while the legislative initiatives of this kind are aimed at making the faithful a tool of internal political struggle. It is absolutely inadmissible. Please, pay the most serious attention to this situation.

The common moral stand on the development of state and society has been regularly stated by the Interreligious Council in Russia, which unites people of the religions traditional for Russia – Orthodoxy, Islam, Judaism and Buddhism. We have a tremendous experience of good-neighbourly relations and we continue walking along the path of fraternal cooperation. In most cases, we come to moral consensus, develop a position on public issues having a moral dimension and convey it to Russian parliament members. For instance, we have managed to achieve the adoption of a law restricting gambling in Russia as its ubiquitous spread in Russia led to negative consequences for the life of many people.

For already several year now we have conducted Christmas Parliamentary Meetings under the aegis of the major annual church forum ‘Christmas Readings’, during which the Patriarch and other representatives of the Russian Orthodox Church discuss together with members of the upper and lower chambers of the Russian parliament some pressing problems of church-state and church-society relations. These meetings have not only become a good tradition but also have given powerful impetus for joint work making it possible to work out the very moral consensus that becomes a basis for legislative work.

Representatives of our Church also take part in the work of the Inter-Parliamentary Assembly of Orthodoxy, which includes 27 countries. In 2007, my predecessor Patriarch Alexy II addressed the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe. And today, speaking at the 137th Assembly of the Inter-Parliamentary Assembly, I am glad to continue the tradition of the Russian Orthodox Church’s interaction with the people’s representatives.

Distinguished representatives of parliaments of the world, allow me once again to thank you for the

invitation and to call you to be continuers of the legal work the ultimate goal of which is the assertion in society of the ideals of goodness, justice and love. And this places on you a great responsibility for the destiny of your nations and the whole humanity.

Patriarchal Press Service

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