Metropolitan Hilarion of Volokolamsk meets with the head of the Maronite Church



On 15 September 2017, at the summer residence of the Maronite patriarchs in Dimane, Lebanon, Metropolitan Hilarion of Volokolamsk, chairman of the Moscow Patriarchate's Department for External Church Relations, met with His Beatitude Maronite Patriarch Béchara Boutros Cardinal al-Raï.

Taking part in the meeting were also Metropolitan Niphon of Philippopolis, representative of the Patriarch of Antioch and All the East to the Patriarch of Moscow and All Russia; Hegumen Arseniy (Sokolov), representative of the Patriarch of Moscow and All Russia to the Patriarch of Antioch and All the East; Mr. V.L. Maksudov, Chargé d'Affaires ad interim of the Russian Federation in Lebanon; and Mr. Alexander Yershov, assistant to the DECR chairman.

Metropolitan Hilarion conveyed to the head of the Maronite Church greetings from His Holiness

Patriarch Kirill of Moscow and All Russia and noted that His Holiness had warm recollections of his visit to the Maronite Patriarchate in November 2011, and of Patriarch Béchara's visit to Moscow in February-March 2013.

As Metropolitan Hilarion emphasized, His Holiness's visit to this region and meetings with the heads of the local Churches gave an opportunity to the Primate of the Russian Orthodox Church to hear a first-hand account of the situation from the Christians of the Middle East and to have full awareness of the scale of the arising crisis.

One of the goals of the DECR chairman's current visit to Lebanon is to continue the coordination of efforts with the local Christian leaders the efforts. All these years the Moscow Patriarchate has been doing all it can to help its suffering brothers in the East. Metropolitan Hilarion noted that the Russian Orthodox Church tried to receive first-hand information about the current humanitarian situation in Syria and Lebanon, so that the aid rendered on its behalf would meet people's essential needs and reach those who needs it most.

As the DECR chairman pointed out, the plight of the Christian population in the Middle East remains an acute problem. It is a matter of deep concern that, as a result of the so-called Arab Spring thousands of Christians had to leave their homeland. Many Syrians found themselves in refugee camps in the territory of Lebanon. "Fully sharing the pain and suffering of these people, the Russian Orthodox Church hopes that enetually the day will come and they will be able to return to their land, to their homes," the Russian archpastor said.

"The defense of the persecuted Christians was the main item on the agenda of the historic meeting between His Holiness Patriarch Kirill and Pope Francis in Havana," Metropolitan Hilarion continued, "We received evidences that the appeal of the heads of the two largest Christian communities on the planet was regarded by the Middle Eastern Christians not only as a sign of hope, but also as an impetus for the intensification of inter-confessional cooperation at the regional level. It is important for the Christians of the East to combine their efforts to help the suffering people and to restore peace and accord in their countries. The Russian Orthodox Church will support such efforts."

As the DECR chairman noted, in April 2016, a joint Orthodox-Catholic delegation from Russia visited Syria and Lebanon. The initiative was implemented within the framework of the humanitarian cooperation of the Moscow Patriarchate and the Holy See. The members of the delegation visited Syrian refugees and held round-table discussions in Zahlé and Damascus, attended by representatives of the local Churches.

"Today in Russia such cooperation is developing even on a larger scale. In April this year, an

interreligious working group for rendering aid to the population of Syria was established under the Presidential Council for Cooperation with Religious Organizations. In June and August, two consignments of humanitarian aid were delivered to Syria. This work, supervised by His Holiness Patriarch Kirill himself, will continue," Metropolitan Hilarion added.

The Maronite Patriarch thanked the DECR chairman for the visit and noted that he had very warm recollections of his meetings with His Holiness Patriarch Kirill of Moscow and Russia in Lebanon and in Moscow.

Having expressed his gratitude to the Russian Orthodox Church for its efforts aimed at rendering assistance to the Christians in the Middle East, His Beatitude emphasized that the major task was to preserve the Christian presence in the region. According to Patriarch Béchara Boutros Cardinal al-Raï, to achieve that, it is necessary to help the Syrian refugees return to their cities, towns and villages, and to exert efforts so that new waves of displaced people were not be forced to leave their homeland.

The participants in the meeting also discussed various issues of cooperation between the Russian Orthodox Church and the Maronite Patriarchate. "We can and must defend together the Christian viewpoint on morality, family, ethics in scientific research and in social and economic relations, and on other topical problems, to exchange experience in such spheres as social and youth ministry and the promotion of relations between the Church and society, and to intensify student exchange and cooperation in the academic area," Metropolitan Hilarion said in conclusion.

DECR Communication Service

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