His Holiness Patriarch Kirill meets with Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas



On 12 May 2017, at the Patriarchal and Synodal residence in St Daniel's Monastery in Moscow, His Holiness Patriarch Kirill of Moscow and All Russia met with H.E. Mr. Mahmoud Abbas, President of the State of Palestine.

The Russian Orthodox Church was also represented by Archpriest Nikolai Balashov, vice-chairman of the Moscow Patriarchate's Department for External Church Relations, and Archpriest Sergy Zvonarev, DECR secretary for far-abroad countries.

Mr. Alexander Rudakov, Deputy Director of the Middle East and North Africa Department of the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, also attended the meeting.

Mr. Mahmoud Abbas was accompanied by Dr. Riad Malki, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the State of Palestine; Mr. Nofal Abdel Hafiz, Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of the State of

Palestine to the Russian Federation; Dr. Mahmoud Al-habbash, Adviser to the President on Religious Affairs; Mr. Saeb Erekat, a member of the Executive Committee of the Palestine Liberation Organization; Mr. Nabil Aburudainah, official representative in the ministerial rank of the President of the State of Palestine; Dr. Mohammad Mustafa, Adviser to the President on Economic Affairs; Mr. Majdi Khaldi, Adviser to the President on Diplomatic Affairs; and Mr. Khaled Miari, Plenipotentiary Minister of the Embassy of Palestine in Russia.

Greeting the President of the State of Palestine and the delegation accompanying him on his visit to Russia, His Holiness Patriarch Kirill said, in particular, “I appreciate the fact that we meet on a regular basis – almost every time you come to Moscow. It gives us the opportunity to exchange opinions on the issues of mutual interest.”

Palestine, the Holy Land, is in the heart of every Orthodox Christian, the Primate of the Russian Church noted. “Therefore the preservation of the holy sites, which is part of your lofty responsibility, is something that we take to heart,” His Holiness continued, “We welcome the significant changes taking place in Palestine with regard to the preservation and maintenance of the holy places. We are also glad that with the assistance of the Russian Federation, a cultural centre has been established in the holy city of Bethlehem. You probably know that the Russian Church, throughout the history of its activities in the Palestinian land, tried to help the Palestinians in various ways, for instance, by building schools and medical institutions. Yet, there was a time when our Church was not able to carry out this mission. We are glad that today Russia can continue its humanitarian mission in the territory of Palestine.”

As His Holiness emphasized, the Russian Church takes to heart the issues of peace in the Middle East and the settlement of the Palestinian problem. “We welcome the decisions of the United Nations and the UN Security Council, aimed at establishing peace in the Palestinian land,” His Holiness said.

The Primate of the Russian Orthodox Church noted with satisfaction the good state of inter-religious relations in the territory of Palestine, as evidenced, for instance, by the life of the Russian people there, many of whom are Orthodox Christians. The Orthodox Christians in Palestine do not suffer any oppression from the religious majority, His Holiness noted and expressed his profound concern over the dramatic decline of the Christian population in Iraq and the mass exodus of Christians from those parts of Syria that are controlled by extremists, as well as from some other countries of the Middle East. “That is why we speak out in favour of the consolidation of the international efforts aimed at putting an end to the armed conflicts in the territory of the Middle Eastern states,” Patriarch Kirill continued.

“Of course, it is not only Christians, but also Muslims and the whole population of these countries who are suffering from the conflicts,” His Holiness said, “Yet, Christians, being the minority in the Middle East, are the most vulnerable part of the population. The aftermaths of the war can be tragic with regard

to the very presence of Christians in the Middle East. I am aware of the position taken by the leaders of the Churches in Syria, Palestine and Lebanon: they are greatly interested in the soonest cessation of all the hostilities and the soonest victory over terrorism."

The President of the State of Palestine warmly thanked His Holiness Patriarch Kirill for the meeting and emphasized the important role of the Russian Orthodox Church and its Primate in the activities aimed at reconciling representatives of different religions and nations.

Having raised the problem of terrorism, he noted with regret that in various public and international discussions terrorism was often associated with Islam. "However, there is no doubt that these crimes have nothing to do with real Islam," Mr. Abbas said.

The President of Palestine expressed his willingness to further develop the good relations with the Russian Orthodox Church and noted that one of the manifestations of these friendly relations was the 135th anniversary of the Imperial Orthodox Palestine Society that would be celebrated in the near future.

Mr. Mahmoud Abbas rated highly the efforts of the Russian state to establish peace in the Middle East, made at various levels.

DECR Communication Service

Photo by Patriarchal press Service

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