Patriarch Kirill attends Easter reception at Ministry of Foreign Affairs



On April 18, 2017, a grand reception on the occasion of the Easter took place at the Grand Mansion of Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

The event was attended by His Holiness Patriarch Kirill of Moscow and All Russia. The Primate of the Russian Orthodox Church was welcomed by Russia's minister of foreign affairs Sergey Lavrov.

Among the attendees were religious leaders and Russian and foreign diplomats. From the Russian Orthodox Church there were Metropolitan Hilarion, head of the Moscow Patriarchate department for external church relations (DECR); Metropolitan Arseny of Istra, first patriarch vicar for Moscow; Archbishop Sergiy of Solnechnogorsk, head of the Moscow Patriarchate administrative secretariat; Bishop Savva of Voskresensk, first deputy head of the Moscow Patriarchate chancellor; Bishop Antoniy of Bogorodsk, head of the Moscow Patriarchate office for the institutions abroad; Archpriest Sergiy Privalov, head of the synodal department for cooperation with the Armed Forces and law enforcement;

Mr. V. Legoida, head of the synodal department for the Church's relations with society and mass media; Archpriest Nikolay Balashov and Archimandrite Philaret (Bulekov), DECR vice-chairmen; and other clergy, and DECR staff members.

Present were also representatives of Local Orthodox Church to the Moscow Patriarchal see, including those of the Orthodox Church of Alexandria, Orthodox Church of Antioch, Orthodox Church of Jerusalem, Serbian Orthodox Church, and Orthodox Church of the Czech Lands and Slovakia.

Paschal hymns were sung by the Moscow Synodal Choir conducted by Russia's Honoured Artist A. Puzakov.

In his speech at the Grand Guests' Hall, Patriarch Kirill noted that the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs in its work protects not only state interests but also makes a significant intellectual contribution to the international debate on matters concerning the essence of human life. When diplomacy is accompanied with the ability to articulate important worldview positions, it rises above routine and protocol, which accompanied external work, making a real intellectual impact on people's awareness and state of mind, His Holiness said addressing the Russian Minister of Foreign Affairs.

In recognition of Mr. Lavrov's contribution to the preservation of the faith and struggle with international terrorism and Christianophobia, Patriarch Kirill awarded him the diploma of the winner of the World Russian People's Council's prize.

Mr. Lavrov addressed himself to His Holiness with words of gratitude and awarded the Primate of the Russian Orthodox Church the Primakov Medal.

Mr. M. Bogdanov, Presidential Special Representative for the Middle East and Africa, was awarded the ROC Order of St. Seraphim of Sarov (Second Degree).

Mr. Lavrov greeted the guests at the White Hall. He spoke about Christianophobia and Islamophobia and expressed the conviction that the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe will work out a declaration on the struggle with these phenomena.

He made a special mention of the situation in the Middle East, which has been plunged in chaos, turning into a provider of terror and illegal migrants to various countries of the world. The destabilization of the situation in the Middle East and North Africa struck a heavy blow on Christians there, actually subjecting them to genocide by extremists, the minister said.

The cynical crimes committed against peaceful believers during a Christian feast day in Egypt are aimed

to stir up inter-confessional strife, the minister said. In this connection, he stressed as especially relevant the provisions of the Joint Statement of Pope Francis of Rome and Patriarch Kirill of Moscow and All Russia, which insist on the need to make urgent steps to stop the mass exodus of Christians from the Middle East.

Let us continue doing all that is possible to prevent attacks on Christians and fractures on inter-civilizational and interreligious grounds, the head of the Russian MFA stressed.

In his speech, Patriarch Kirill noted that in the Paschal days, millions of Christians seek to fit their calling, to work for peace, to establish relations with those with whom it is difficult to do, and to bring the word of reconciliation. It is gratifying that today ever more and more world politicians begin to realize the importance of asserting the moral principle and traditional values in people's common life, the importance of peaceful coexistence between nations. The modern world is tired of wars, enmity, hypocrisy and deception, His Holiness said.

Stating with regret that in modern society including the mass media, open lies have become admissible and easily proved opposite opinions have been ignored, Patriarch Kirill stressed that people are tired of it all. What is needed is a fresh wing that should blow from different sides filling the sails of our peoples so that they could meet each other half way overcoming the enormous problems of today.

Summing up the past year, Patriarch Kirill mentioned the Council which took place in Crete. It was supposed to be pan-Orthodox but was not attended by all the Local Orthodox Churches. We had worked to the last moment to have such a Council happen, His Holiness related. We had made all possible efforts, but after it became clear that these efforts were not needed at that moment and that the position we proposed as a compromise in order to create a platform for a broad representation of the Orthodox Churches in Crete was not accepted by all, nothing left for us but to refrain from participating in it. We are aware of the difficulties existing today in the Orthodox family and believe that the Council in Crete has played its role as an important event for a whole number of Local Churches that deemed it possible to attend it. On the way to a truly pan-Orthodox Council it is necessary to solve the existing problems energetically and dynamically and it will lead us to a common position and ensure at some point a possibility for its conduct. It is gratifying, the patriarch pointed out, that the non-participation of particular Churches in the Council has not generated new dividing lines, as was shown by the common Orthodox celebrations that took place last November in Moscow on the occasion of the Patriarch of Moscow's 70th birthday.

The situation of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church was a special subject of the patriarchal speech. Its faithful are oppressed and attempts are made to deprive them of civil rights, for instance, through adopting laws which exclude the normal registration of Orthodox parishes in Ukraine. There are also

forcible captures of churches. But in this difficult situation when accusation and insults are poured on the Ukrainian Church, when demands are made that it should sever relation with the Moscow Patriarchate and accused of a lack of patriotism, the Orthodox people keep faithful to the canonical church order. Those who are thrown out of their churches have remained in the jurisdiction of the canonical Church and are often engaged in building new churches. But even newly built churches can come under the threat of capture. All these outrages are hushed up, not becoming a subject of broad consideration either in the Ukrainian public space or abroad.

In this grave situation, the Ukrainian Orthodox Church continues with calm and dignity to carry out its peacemaking mission, without supporting the political stand of any particular party or force but remaining the Church for all its parishioners also in Donbas and the Lvov region and other regions in Ukraine. It is the super-political peacemaking mission of the canonical Church, His Holiness Kirill pointed out.

Patriarch Kirill also testified that canonical Orthodoxy in Ukraine is supported by all the Local Orthodox Churches. He made a special mention of the efforts of the Ukrainian Church to promote the exchange of war prisoners in the conflict zone. Speaking about the efforts made in this sphere, he expressed hope that this humanitarian action would bring at least some respite and joy to people when they would meet their brothers, sisters, husbands who were in captivity for long months.

One of the most acute problems today is the situation in the Middle East where many people die at the hands of extremists and where, as a result of the policy of genocide towards believers in Christ, the Christian population has been radically reduced. We seek to support by word and deed the Orthodox Church of Antioch as it is suffering from the hands of extremists, His Holiness noted.

The Russian operation for struggle with terrorism in Syria has given hope to Christians. The leaders of the Middle East churches have repeatedly spoken publicly about the persecution, and asked Russia to protect Christians in Syria and Iraq, the Patriarch reminded the gathering. In cases when settlements with predominant Christian population are liberated with the participation of the Russian Aerospace Forces, it means that people are saved from extermination.

Christians are persecuted in other region, too. Thus, In Nigeria, Christian believers are slaughtered by whose settlements and their churches are burnt by hundreds. However, the world public has passed this tragedy in silence as if nothing happened, the patriarch noted. The Christian population is subject to strong pressure also in North Sudan, Myanmar, Pakistan and other countries.

His Holiness also introduced the attendees to the good examples of fraternal cooperation, such as realization of the project with participation of the Russian Orthodox Church for the mosaic adornment of

the church of St. Sava in Belgrade, and the building of a church for the Russian-speaking community in the Metropolis of Tamassos, Orthodox Church of Cyprus.

Speaking about Orthodoxy in South-East Asia, His Holiness mentioned in particular the construction of ROC churches in Cambodia and Laos.

His Holiness also spoke about the training of candidates for priesthood for parishes of the Chinese Autonomous Orthodox Church. Step by step we are progressing along this path, he said.

Speaking about inter-Christian cooperation in sphere of culture, His Holiness pointed in particular to the broadening cooperation between the Pontifical Council for Culture and the ROC Patriarchal Council for Culture.

DECR Communication Service

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