Metropolitan Hilarion meets with ambassadors of 11 Arab countries



On 21 February 2017, at the Metochion of the Orthodox Church of Antioch in Moscow, Metropolitan Hilarion of Volkolamsk, chairman of the Moscow Patriarchate's Department for External Church Relations, met with diplomatic representatives of eleven Arab states. The meeting was organized by Metropolitan Niphon of Philippopolis, representative of the Patriarch of the Great Antioch and All the East to the Patriarch of Moscow and All Russia.

Taking part in the meeting were Ambassadors of Lebanon, Syria, Palestine, Sudan, Algeria, Kuwait, Qatar, Iraq, Morocco, Yemen, as well as the chargé d'affaires ad interim of Jordan.

Among those in attendance were also Archpriest Nikolai Balashov, DECR vice-chairman; Hegumen Arseny (Sokolov), representative of the Patriarch of Moscow and All Russia to the Patriarch of the Great Antioch and All the East; and Mr. Fadi Nasr, secretary general of the Orthodox Youth Movement (Church of Antioch).

Metropolitan Niphon of Philipoppolis opened the meeting, saying in particular, "At this time of hardship

for the Orthodox Church of Antioch the Russian Church, led by her Primate, His Holiness Patriarch Kirill, raises her voice in defence of Christians of the Middle East." Metropolitan Niphon mentioned the visit of Patriarch Kirill to the Patriarchate of Antioch and thanked him on behalf of the Church of Antioch, led by His Beatitude Patriarch John X, for the aid that the Russian Church continues to render to the suffering faithful of Antioch.

Metropolitan Hilarion of Volokolmask expressed his gratitude to the head of the Antiochian Metochion for the opportunity to meet with ambassadors of the Arab states.

In his address, he noted that for many centuries Christians and Muslims lived in peace in the Middle East and North Africa. "It is my deep conviction that differences in religious beliefs must not be a cause for confrontation and enmity," the DECR chairman said, "The commitment to one's own tradition and at the same time openness to dialogue is, in my opinion, a pledge of friendly and trust-based relations between Christians and Muslims."

The Russian Orthodox Church is deeply concerned over the plight of Christians in the Middle East and North Africa, Metropolitan Hilarion also said, "The great evil of extremism acting under religious slogans has raised its head. Terrorists exterminate Christianity by fire and sword at the places where Christians have been living for nearly two thousand years. I am convinced that the situation of a Christian community in this or that country of the Middle East is an indicator of security and stability."

"Extremism has become a major challenge for all the traditional religions," Metropolitan Hilarion continued, "Regrettably, extremists often propagate the idea that Christians are a part of the sinful Western world, that they are accomplices of Islam's enemies. This idea is deeply erroneous if for no other reason than because Christians are the indigenous population of the Arab world. There is yet another erroneous concept that is often heard, for instance, from the mass media. It says that there is some "religious terrorism" or "Islamic terrorism." It is my deep conviction that there cannot be such a notion as "religious terrorism." There cannot be any terrorism on religious grounds or terrorism based on religious beliefs. Not one of the traditional religions teaches to kill people. All religions call for peace. And the history of co-existence of Christians and Muslims in the Middle East, in other regions, in Russia proves that the two religions can co-exist in peace and mutual respect."

As the DECR chairman emphasized, a single global anti-terrorist coalition, uniting all people of good will, is needed in order to defend terrorism. "The inter-faith dialogue is important today as never before, for the soil, in which seeds of terrorism take roots are the impressionable young minds. To prevent young people from forming mistaken ideas about religion, we must do all within our power to enable them to learn more about their own religious traditions and about other traditions as well."

As Metropolitan Hilarion noted, the participants in the session of the Interreligious Council of Russia, held earlier that day at the Patriarchal residence in St Daniel's Monastery in Moscow, expressed once again their commitment to peace and dialogue.

The book by Metropolitan Hilarion of Volokolamsk, entitled "The Mystery of Faith", published in the Arabic language by the Orthodox Youth Movement of the Church of Antioch, was presented during the meeting. Each participant received a copy of the book.

DECR Communication Service

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