Address by Metropolitan Hilarion of Volokolamsk on the First Anniversary of the Meeting in Havana, Fribourg, 12 February 2017

A meeting dedicated to the first anniversary of the historic meeting between Patriarch Kirill of Moscow and All Russia and Pope Francis took place at the University of Fribourg, Switzerland. Among the speakers were Metropolitan Hilarion of Volokolamsk, chairman of the Moscow Patriarchate's Department for External Church Relations, and Cardinal Kurt Koch, President of the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity. Given below is the text of Metropolitan Hilarion's presentation.

Your Eminences and Your Excellences,

dear fathers, brothers and sisters,

Exactly a year has passed since the meeting of Pope Francis and Patriarch Kirill of Moscow and All Russia in Havana on February 12, 2016. The anniversary of the meeting that we are celebrating today gives us an opportunity to ponder on its importance and to discuss its first outcomes and prospects of the Orthodox-Catholic relations. I would like to thank Msgr. Charles Morerod, Bishop of Lausanne, Geneva and Fribourg, and the Fribourg University leadership for arranging this event.

The meeting of the Pope and the Patriarch was almost immediately and quite rightly called historic. It was the first ever meeting of a Primate of the Russian Orthodox Church and a Bishop of Rome. The journey towards it took 20 years; serious obstacles and superstitions had to be overcome so that it could take place. What also made the meeting historic was a visible expression of the level of trust and mutual understanding recently attained by our Churches, which opens up new perspectives for the Orthodox-Catholic relations.

Besides, we should not lose sight of the fact that the meeting in Cuba was of the utmost public and political significance owing to the message contained in the Joint Declaration of the heads of the two Churches and addressed to the world religious and political leaders and to all people of good will. In fact, the major reason behind the meeting was the tragic situation created by the armed conflicts and actions of terrorists in the Middle East and North Africa.

The meeting, intentionally organized in Latin America, *far from the longstanding disputes of the "Old World"*, was supposed to predetermine many of the two Churches' historic decisions and actions, which applies to both inter-church and international and social relations. Indeed, mentioned in the very first paragraph of the Joint Declaration are the three groups of issues that were discussed at the meeting and further explored in the document. These are *the mutual relations between the Churches, the crucial problems of our faithful, and the outlook for the progress of human civilization* (par. 1).

The Joint Declaration speaks honestly of the problems that still exist in the relationships between our Churches. The document states with regret that the Catholics and the Orthodox have been divided *and for nearly one thousand years have been deprived of communion in the Eucharist* (par. 5). This division has theological and cultural grounds; however, it is, first and foremost, *the outcome of human weakness and of sin* that go against the will of the Saviour regarding the unity of His disciples (cf. Jn 17:21). If this division runs counter to the will of Christ for His Holy Church, then we must not put up with it, taking it for granted. The Pope and the Patriarch expressed their hope that the meeting in Havana *may contribute to the re-establishment of this unity willed by God, for which Christ prayed… and inspire Christians throughout the world to pray to the Lord with renewed fervour for the full unity of all His disciples.* According to the Primates, the meeting is to become a positive step in this direction and a sign of hope for all people of good will.

The Joint Declaration points out to what the Orthodox and the Catholics have in common already. The Patriarch and the Pope emphasize that they *met like brothers in the Christian faith,* and in paragraphs 1 and 4 they refer to the basic principles of faith and the spiritual tradition of the first millennium that unite the Orthodox and the Catholics, that is, to the belief in the Most Holy Trinity and in the God-manhood of Jesus Christ, and to the veneration of the Most Holy Mother of God and the saints. The document makes special mention of martyrs *who have given witness to their faithfulness to Christ and have become the "seed of Christians"* (par. 4). It should be noted that martyrdom as an uncompromising witness to the Christian faith is the central theme of the Joint Declaration.

It is not fortuitous that the Pope and the Patriarch call the sufferings of Christians in the Middle East "martyrdom." The present-day martyrs, belonging to different Churches, *at the cost of their own lives have given witness to the truth of the Gospel, preferring death to the denial of Christ*. *United by their shared suffering*, they are *a pledge of the unity of Christians*. Thus, the document draws a direct parallel between the martyrs of the first centuries, venerated both by the Orthodox and by the Catholics, and the modern-day martyrs who by confessing together the Christian faith in the face of death overcome the existing divisions.

What is also important is that the Joint Declaration mentions the revival of Christianity in Russia and in other countries of Eastern Europe. This year in Russia will be marked by the centenary of the revolution

of 1917 that opened the way to persecutions of the Orthodox Church and other Christian confessions in the country. In the dreadful years of theomachy, thousands of Orthodox Christians followed the way of the cross. Later they were canonized in the Synaxis of the New Martyrs and Confessors of the Russian Church. Among those who shared sufferings with them were members of other Churches, for instance, of the Roman Catholic Church.

The 20th-century martyrdom did not only become a pledge of the revival of the ecclesial life in Russia and other Eastern European countries after the decades of the totalitarian regime, but also laid the foundation of the Orthodox-Catholic interaction. *Orthodox and Catholics often work side by side. Giving witness to the values of the Gospel they attest to the existence of the shared spiritual foundations of human co-existence* (par. 14). The Orthodox-Catholic cooperation fruitfully develops in Russia, where the sphere of inter-church cooperation has widened considerably for the past 25 years, affecting various aspects of public life. It would have been absolutely impossible in the Soviet period when the authorities imposed restrictions on the Churches' activities. The witness of the martyrs of the first centuries, of the 20th century and of the present day is the basis for rapprochement between our Churches and for their joint work, even though the theological obstacles in our path of unity have not been overcome yet.

At the same time I would like to note with satisfaction that the year of the Havana meeting was marked by the progress in the Orthodox-Catholic theological dialogue. After long preliminary discussions, in September of last year at the 14th plenary session of the Joint Commission for Theological Dialogue between the Roman Catholic Church and the Orthodox Church that took place in Chieti, Italy, an important document was adopted, entitled "Synodality and Primacy During the First Millennium: Towards a Common Understanding in Service to the Unity of the Church." It opened the door to further development of the dialogue between the two ancient Christian traditions. I hope that in the nearest future we will be able to set about examining the key issue that is the object-matter of our division – the synodality and primacy in the Churches of the East and the West in the second millennium.

The context in which Christians live today, as well as the challenges facing all of humanity make us, even though the full unity has not been restored, learn to live and act in this world not as competitors, but as brothers, in order to defend together our common values. As the meeting of the Primates of the two largest Christian Churches demonstrated, both sides realize the necessity of urgent and, as the Declaration puts it, coordinated actions.

The tragedy of the genocide of Christians in the Middle East and in North and Central Africa was at the core of the meeting and the Joint Declaration. The Pope and the Patriarch called upon the forces combating extremism to concerted actions, so that the political leaders might overcome their differences and come together to fight the common threat. The powerful appeal that came from the depth of the believing heart could not but be heard: immediately after the meeting, during the negotiations in Munich,

representatives of Russia and the USA agreed on a truce in Syria, with both the Syrian government and the opposition joining the agreement. It was the first step on the path outlined by the Joint Declaration of the Pope and the Patriarch.

Over the past year, especially in view of the escalation of tensions around Aleppo and Mosul, the Supreme Authority of the Russian Orthodox Church at various meetings with leaders and representatives of the USA and Western European countries constantly raised the issue of the ongoing conflict in the Middle East and of the persecution of Christians in the region, emphasizing that combined efforts within one coalition were needed to oppose terrorism. In this regard I would like to mention the visits of His Holiness Patriarch Kirill of Moscow and All Russia to Great Britain and France in the end of 2016, during which His Holiness met with top government officials, discussing with them the Middle East problem.

A positive step in promoting inter-church cooperation and supporting the Christian population of the Middle East was a visit to Lebanon and Syria of a group of representatives of the Russian Orthodox and the Roman Catholic Churches on April 6–7, 2016. The consultations with local confessions held during the visit are to contribute to drawing up the further joint projects aimed at rendering aid to our brothers and sisters in distress. Several major tasks were outlined that will be necessary to tackle in order to achieve the overarching aim of the preservation of the Christian presence in the region. These tasks include the restoration of churches and monasteries, traditionally serving as centres of consolidation of Christian communities, the employment security for the local population, especially young people, and the rebuilding of Syria's economic infrastructure. In all these matters the Syrians expect from the world community the full-scale assistance as soon as the war in their country comes to an end.

A short while ago, on 9-12 January 2017, the 5th European Catholic-Orthodox Forum was held in Paris. The meeting is organized every two years by the Council of the European Bishops' Conferences in cooperation with the Local Orthodox Churches. This year the forum focused on the threat of terrorism – the problem directly connected with the situation in the Middle East and affecting everyone these days. In my address on the violation of religious rights and freedoms, delivered at the meeting, I emphasized that *today as never before, a consolidated witness is important of the Churches before the world of the need to adopt urgent measures aimed at protecting the Christian population. The global system of political and international relations is now undergoing serious changes, and therefore we have a chance to bolster within it the protection of the rights and interests of Christians in the Middle East and Africa.* In its concluding message the participants in the meeting noted the necessity of close cooperation between the Orthodox and the Catholics in the face of the unprecedented global challenges and expressed their solidarity with the suffering Christians of the Middle East, Africa and Asia, deploring the discrimination on religious grounds in all its forms. The forum became yet another considerable joint contribution of the Orthodox and the Roman Catholic Churches to the restoration of peace and mutual

understanding between Christians and Muslims in the long suffering land of the Middle East.

Hopefully, the message of the two Primates calling to exert every effort to stop bloodshed in Ukraine will also at last be heard by those involved in the conflict, and the lasting peace will be re-established in the country where the Orthodox and the Catholics live side by side. This appeal is becoming ever more urgent as the tension is growing in Eastern Ukraine where just recently the hostilities have resumed, causing casualties among civilians. On the 25th anniversary of independence of the Ukrainian state, celebrated in August 2016, both His Holiness Patriarch Kirill and His Holiness Pope Francis in their messages of greetings again called upon the leadership of the country to do all within their power to find a peaceful resolution to the conflict. The Supreme Authority of the Russian Orthodox Church and the Holy See repeatedly emphasized that the only way to settle the confrontation in Ukraine was to implement the Minsk agreements. Regrettably, we see that the opposite is happening, and in their attempts to resolve the conflict people are resorting to military means again.

In these tragic circumstances the role of the Churches called to act together for the sake of peace increases greatly. It is impossible to establish peace if the Orthodox and the Greek Catholics do not combine their efforts to overcome the historical enmity. The statement first made at the highest level in Havana that the Unia is not the way to re-establish unity between the Churches and that the proselytism in all its manifestations is unacceptable in the Orthodox-Catholic relations, became an important prerequisite to the restoration of trust on the part on the Orthodox Christians. The Joint Declaration merely confirmed the affirmation of the joint Orthodox-Catholic document adopted in Balamand in 1993, entitled “Uniatism as Method of Union in the Past and the Present Search for Full Communion.” However, we know what irritation the meeting of Pope Francis and Patriarch Kirill and especially those propositions of the declaration that dealt with Ukraine and the Unia caused in the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church. The UGCC Major Archbishop Sviatoslav Shevchuk had this to say concerning the Joint Declaration, “We have outlived more than one such declaration; we will outlive this one too.”

Over and over again, despite the agreements reached at a high level between the Orthodox and the Catholic Churches at a heavy cost, the Unia still makes its presence felt, sowing enmity and hatred and putting, systematically and persistently, obstacles in the way of reconciliation between the East and the West. That is why we believe that the discussion of the issue of Unia which began, but was not completed within the framework of the theological dialogue between the Roman Catholic Church and the Orthodox Church, should be continued and taken to its logical conclusion.

The Orthodox and the Catholics must eventually realize that the old outlook based on rivalry and “fishing for souls” must give place to fraternal cooperation in view of the challenges facing our Churches in Europe where under the pretence of promoting tolerance, democracy and liberal values, the Christianity and traditional moral values are being subjected to real persecution. The Joint Declaration of Patriarch

Kirill and Pope Francis with renewed vigour calls us to such cooperation, attaching considerable importance to the issues of marriage, family and childhood as the foundations of any healthy society. Responding to the alarming tendency in a number of Western countries to place *other forms of cohabitation* on the same level as the traditional family, the Primates of the two Churches, in conformity with the two-millennia-old Christian tradition, emphasize that it is the family as union of man and woman in which children are born is *a path of holiness* (par. 19).

The terrible problem of abortions has become a direct consequence of the disregard for the Divine plan for family, giving a new life. The Patriarch and the Pope could not pass over in silence this tragic situation. *We call on all to respect the inalienable right to life. Millions are denied the very right to be born into the world*, the Joint Declaration states (par. 21). In Russia, where in 1920, soon after the antireligious revolution, the abortion was legalized for the first time in history, in 2013, according to official statistics, over a million of infants' lives were taken as the result of abortions. Because of the legalized prolicide we lose at least a million people every year. To put an end to this unacceptable practice, legal prohibitions do not suffice. Every potential parent must reject in his/her heart the very idea that it is possible to kill an unborn child. To achieve that, it is necessary to change people's attitude to life, to family, and to themselves.

Such conviction inspired both the Joint Declaration of the two Primates and Pope Francis's apostolic exhortation *Amoris Laetitia* published in the spring of the last year. Though the document was elaborated in the follow-up of the General Assemblies of the Synod of Bishops of the Roman Catholic Church, held in 2014 and 2015 and dedicated to the issues of family and marriage in today's world, it develops many of the statements of the Havana Declaration.

Outlined at the meeting of the Pope and the Patriarch were a whole number of projects that will contribute to the rapprochement between the believers of the Orthodox and the Roman Catholic Churches. It includes, in particular, pilgrimages to the Christian holy sites. For instance, great many Orthodox pilgrims visit Bari every year to venerate the relics of St Nicholas; and pilgrims from the Roman Catholic Church come to venerate the Orthodox shrines. We may intensify these two flows so that people, gaining access to the sacred places located in the territory of the other Church could meet and learn more about each other. The meeting in Havana raised a great interest among Catholics in the Russian Orthodox Church, in its rich history, spiritual traditions and the revival that had followed the decades of persecutions. The past year saw a very significant growth in the numbers of pilgrimages of the faithful of the Roman Catholic Church to Russia. Suffice it to say that over this period we have received groups of clergymen, seminarians and laypeople from Ireland, Germany, Italy, and France, and it seems that the interest is increasing. It is difficult to overestimate the importance of such direct contacts with the spiritual life and shrines of the other Church. It helps people not only enrich themselves spiritually, but also broaden their cultural horizon, overcome old prejudeces and reject misconceptions.

The Summer Institute organized by Ss Cyril and Methodius Theological Institute of Postgraduate Studies for students of the Pontifical educational institutions is a project that was launched in 2015 within the framework of cultural cooperation between the Russian Orthodox Church and the Holy See. Having gained a fresh impetus after the meeting in Havana, it has a great educational potential. Coming to Russia for a fortnight, students of the Roman Catholic Church can not only improve their knowledge of the Russian language, but also learn more about the traditions and the contemporary life of the Russian Church and visit its holy places. In turn, since 2016, a group of clergymen and students of the Russian Orthodox Church has had an opportunity to visit Rome and learn more about the work of various departments of the Roman Curia and about the academic activities of the Pontifical universities. Undoubtedly, such regular contacts, which often grow into friendly relations, will help the faithful of our two Churches regard each other *not as competitors, but as brothers*, and learn *to live together in peace and love, and to be "in harmony with one another."* This is what the Pope and the Patriarch in their Joint Declaration call upon Christians to do (par. 24), and this is the only way the Orthodox and the Catholics will be able to *work together fraternally in proclaiming the Good News of salvation* (par. 28).

Much of what was achieved last year in the sphere of the Orthodox-Catholic relations was possible thanks to the historic meeting of His Holiness Patriarch Kirill and His Holiness Pope Francis on February 12, 2016. It not only was a sign of progress in the relationships between our Churches, but also, what is much more important, showed the way for their further development. The Joint Declaration of the two Primates became, I dare say, a real charter that we should refer to for guidance for many years to come. Only in this case our common witness will be worthy of the witness of the Christian martyrs of the past and of the present, who have already achieved unity at the Altar of the Holy Lamb.

The meeting in Havana is to have far-reaching consequences for the whole world. The word of the Pope and the Patriarch, full of pastoral concern and love, is addressed to all people, including the political and public leaders. It is on whether they will respond to this word or not that the future of humanity depends.

Source: https://mospat.ru/en/news/48716/