



Patriarch Kirill meets with Israeli ambassador Mr. Zvi Heifetz

On September 20, 2016, His Holiness Patriarch Kirill of Moscow and All Russia met with the Israeli Ambassador to Russia Mr. Zvi Heifetz at the patriarchal residence in St. Daniel Monastery.

The head of the Israeli diplomatic mission was accompanied by Mr. Noah Ginosar, first secretary of the Israeli embassy in Moscow.

From the Russian side, the meeting was attended by Bishop Anthony of Bogorodsk, head of the Moscow Patriarchate's office for institutions abroad, and Archimandrite Philaret (Bulekov), vice-chairman of the Moscow Patriarchate's department for external church relations (DECR).

Welcoming the guest, His Holiness Patriarch Kirill said that the Holy Land has always occupied a special place in the consciousness of Russian Orthodox people. 'Next year we will celebrate the 170th anniversary of the Russian Ecclesiastical Mission in Jerusalem. It was established to help our pilgrims visit the Holy Land and it has always played a positive role, including in promoting relations between our two states and peoples', he said.

According to His Holiness, as the flow of Russian pilgrims to the Holy Lands has considerably grown, the significance of this religious factor in the relations both between the Russian Federation and the State of Israel and between the peoples of the two countries is growing, too.

The Primate of the Russian Orthodox Church shared his memories of meeting and talking with Israeli diplomats at the time when he headed the Department for External Church Relations. 'We have always stood for development of relations between our states, and today I am pleased to testify that these relations are those of friendship', His Holiness stressed.

To a great extent, a contribution to this is made by the fact that among Israeli citizens there are people linked with Russia by birth, culture and language, His Holiness noted. According to various estimates, almost half a million people in Israel speak perfect Russia.

His Holiness told his guest that pilgrims who have been to Israel tell they felt at home there. 'We appreciate that. May God help the people of Israel and the people of Russia to preserve these relations, working together for peace, including in the Middle East', His Holiness said.

The Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary Ambassador to the Russian Federation, on his part, thanked His Holiness for the warm welcome and kind words.

He stressed that contacts with the Russian Orthodox Church are important for Israel both on the level of the state and the people; they contribute to the development of good relations between countries, too. 'Our President, who has been here only recently, met with you and was very glad to have that meeting', the ambassador continued, 'He had three official meetings: with the President of Russia, you and the Prime Minister'.

'We are pleased by the fact that your pilgrims feel at home in Israel', he stressed and expressed hope for a further growth of the number of pilgrimages from Russia.

DECR Communication Service

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