Patriarch Kirill leads the 15th Ceremony of Awarding the Prize of the International Foundation for the Unity of Orthodox Nations



On February 20, 2015, His Holiness Patriarch Kirill of Moscow and All Russia led the 15th annual ceremony of awarding the 2014 Patriarch Alexy Prize of the International Public Foundation for the Unity of Orthodox Nations, at the Church Councils Hall of the Cathedral Church of Christ the Saviour. The prize is awarded 'in recognition of outstanding work to strengthen the unity of Orthodox nations, to assert and promote Christian values in the life of society'.

The prize winners were His Beatitude John X, Patriarch of Antioch, Riga Mayor Nil Ushakov (Latvia), and Mr. Sergey Stepashin, chairman of the Imperial Orthodox Palestinian Society (IOPS).

Before the ceremony, Patriarch Kirill had a meeting with Riga Mayor N. Ushakov, at the patriarchal chambers of the Church of Christ the Saviour. Then he talked with other prize winners.

The prize awarding was attended by high-ranking church hierarchs and statesmen as well as ambassadors of the far and near abroad.

After the screening of a documentary on the International Foundation for the Unity of Orthodox Nations, its president Mr. V. Alekseev made an introductory speech and invited Patriarch Kirill to the stage to open the solemn ceremony.

Patriarch Kirill and Mr. V. Alekseev presented diplomas and decorations to 2014 prize winners – Patriarch John X of Antioch and All the East, Riga Mayor Nil Ushakov, and IOPS Chairman S. Stepashin.

Having thanked the Foundation for honouring him with its prize, Patriarch John said, 'Allow me, first of all, to say that you have fastened to my breast a symbol of recognition, while I, in my turn, would like to fasten it to the breast of our brothers – Metropolitan Paul Yazigi and Metropolitan Mar Gregory John Ibrahim of the Syrian Orthodox Church, who were kidnapped almost two years ago. I place this recognition on the breast of the much suffering Church of Antioch, the honourable daughter of the countries of the East abundantly sown with seeds of old history which cannot be shaken by the turmoil of today. We in Antioch are rooted in Syria, Iraq and Lebanon – in every square foot of land in the East. I place this recognition on the breast of every mother and widow, on the graves of martyrs, who have paid dearly for the false names of extremist ideology'.

The head of the Orthodox Church of Antioch thanked the Russian authorities for promoting peace dialogue in Syria and the Middle East and expressed gratitude to Patriarch Kirill of Moscow and All Russia.

'We call to peace and we state that the sound of a masonry hammer is stronger than that of war in any place of the planet including the Middles East', he said, emphasizing, 'Though the Church of Antioch is wounded by what is taking place in the countries under her care, she is not afraid of today's trials because it is united with resurrection and light; for the Lord is her life and power'.

Accepting the prize, the Riga mayor said in particular, 'Our country used to go through various trials in various periods of time, and I am confident that it was the inter-confessional friendship between people of Latvia that helped us to overcome these trials and helped our society to develop and remain strong. You can see Catholic, Protestant and Orthodox cathedrals standing in our streets and squares opposite each other, and next to them a prayer house of Old Believers. I am sincerely grateful to the Orthodox Church and His Holiness Patriarch Kirill of Moscow and All Russia for all the support we can see, because the role of the Orthodox Church in the inter-confessional world and in development of the state

and society cannot be overestimated. Thank you very much for this. We are looking forward to your visit to Latvia. It is expected not only by the Orthodox but also all the Christians, all the people of the country'.

In his speech, Mr. S. Stepashin spoke about the work that the IOPS has carried out in the Holy Land. 'Russia was the only state that came to it with peace – with church parishes, hospitals and good works… We lost a lot in the mid-1960s', he reminded, saying that the time has come 'to return what belonged, belongs and will belong to my Motherland, the Russian Orthodox Church and to our people'. He also informed the gathering about the work the IOPS carried out to give humanitarian aid to Christians in the Middles East.

The ceremony concluded with a concert devoted to the 100th birthday of Georgy Sviridov and the 175th birthday of Petr Tchaikovsky.

Patriarchal Press Service

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