



## **Patriarch Kirill meets with Iran's ambassador to Russia**



On September 24, 2014, His Holiness Patriarch Kirill of Moscow and All Russia met with the ambassador of the Islamic Republic of Iran, H.E. Mehdi Sanaei, at the patriarchal residence in Chisty Pereulok.

Welcoming his guest, Patriarch Kirill pointed out that the long-standing relations between the peoples of Russia and Iran have developed especially actively in recent times. He noted the importance of the forthcoming visit to Russia by President Roukhani, who is to visit Astrakhan on September 29. In this connection, His Holiness told Mr. Sanaei the story of how the church of St. Vladimir in Astrakhan had been saved from closure and destruction in the years of persecution thanks to the local Muslim people.

They discussed the results of the 9<sup>th</sup> meeting of the Joint Russian-Iranian Commission for Dialogue between Orthodoxy and Islam. Mr. Sanaei noted that Patriarch Kirill himself was one of the founders of the commission when he as DECR chairman visited Iran in 1995 and negotiated its establishment with

Ayatollah Muhammad Ali Tashiri. They also talked about the problems to be considered by the next meeting of the commission to take place in 2016 in Moscow. His Holiness said, "Our dialogue, may be not very noticeably, but does make its influence on the present social thinking and views of the problems that we consider". He underlined that in the area of social morality the both sides proceed from similar values. Mr. Sanaei expressed interest in the intensification of cooperation in the area of academic and students' exchange between theological higher education institutes and in the area of culture.

His Holiness also spoke about problem of extremism which uses religious slogans, expressing serious concern over the fate of Christians in northern Iraq. Mr. Sanaei set forth the stand taken by his country on the problem of motivated pseudo-religious ideas of extremism and the situation of Christians in the region. He also reminded His Holiness that in 2013, thanks to his appeal to the Iranian leaders, Christian pastor Youcef Nadarkhani, who had been sentenced to death, was pardoned and released.

The ambassador also underlined that Patriarch Kirill is well known and loved in Iran. On behalf of the leaders of his country, he invited the head of the Russian Orthodox Church to visit Iran and to meet with Supreme Religious Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei. "I have taken this invitation very attentively. I cannot say when it will happen but I really would like to visit Iran and meet with the religious leader of your country", Patriarch Kirill said in response.

The Iranian ambassador, who was responsible for the cultural work of the Iranian embassy in Russia in the period from 1999-2004, thanked His Holiness for the continued benevolent dialogue and his support of the Islamic community in Russia, pointing to the leading role of the Russian Orthodox Church in maintaining interreligious peace in Russia.

*DECR Communication Service*