Address by Metropolitan Hilarion of Volokolamsk to the 1st Inter-parliamentary Assembly of Orthodoxy

On June 26, the opening of the 21st Inter-parliamentary Assembly of Orthodoxy took place in the State Duma under the theme "Parliamentary Democracy – Orthodoxy: Values and Meanings". Below is the address to the Assembly by the Chairman of the Moscow Patriarchate' department for external church relations, Metropolitan Hilarion of Volokolamsk.

Esteemed Participants and Guests of the Assembly,

I am glad to greet the parliament members from various countries of the world and numerous guests united by participation in the 21st General Assembly of the Inter-Parliamentary Assembly of Orthodoxy.

For the years of its existence, the Assembly has turned into an authoritative body of international parliamentary cooperation, assembling under its aegis representatives of national parliaments bound up by common values of Orthodox Christianity. It has become possible thanks to the laborious efforts of those who stood at the foundation of the Assembly. I cannot but note the contribution made by Russian parliament members – Victor Zorkaltsev, who was IAO president at the dawn of its formation and later, Sergey Popov, present long-standing president of the organization, as well as their colleagues from Greece and other countries who took an active part in the work of the Assembly.

The Inter-parliamentary Assembly of Orthodoxy was established with the aim to unite parliament members from various parts of the world. Unfortunately, secular norms of international cooperation continue to prevail in the European continent, seeking to exclude religion from the public sphere. It is my conviction that this state of affairs is imposed on most citizens in European countries and other regions of the world, who wish to see agents of values stemming from religion in the global space.

The work of the Assembly has become a notable phenomenon in international life. However, there is still a long way to be covered in order that a real alternative to secularized international relations may be created. The voice of many millions of Orthodox believers living in various parts of the universe should be heard and taken into account in discussions on pressing problems on the international agenda. It is what the Assembly as a mouthpiece of values of the Orthodox world should contribute to. This organization is also called to demonstrate to sceptics that there are factors of international relations other than stock market indexes and investment climate. The non-material dimension of human life is

primary and therefore should be decisive in international relations. I mean first of all moral ideals and meanings and the dignity of a human being, which is inseparable from his or her virtue and ability to love those around and to renounce egoism. The latter is viewed by the world of business as rather a brake on the way to successful economic development. This attitude to matters of morality has become one of the principal causes of the world economic crisis, whose consequences have not been overcome to this day. Global economy is built on the development of new markets through pressing out competitors and this even by force and military actions. Before our own eyes a considerable number of local and regional conflicts have grown into bloody wars, which have changed the face of the Middle East and North Africa. The so-called “Arab Spring” has led to the appearance of uncontrollable extremist forces and radical groups who are destroying the inter-ethnic and interreligious peace and harmony in the region. This has become a real tragedy for the Christian population in the Middle East and North Africa countries. In Iraq, Syria and Lebanon, many Christian churches and monasteries have been destroyed. An enormous number of Christians have fled their native land in a search for asylum and attempt to save their lives.

The escalation of violence in Ukraine, where a considerable part of the Russian Orthodox Church’s flock lives, has become another political, economic and humanitarian challenge to the world community. The suffering of the people in east and south Ukraine cannot leave us indifferent. With a blessing of His Holiness Patriarch Kirill of Moscow and All Russia, prayer is lifted up daily in our churches for the cessation of the bloodshed and restoration of peace. We pray to God that the division encouraged by interested forces may leave people’s hearts and minds and that they may come to forgiveness and reconciliation. The Church will never identify with those who are engaged in fratricide, on whatever side of the frontline or barricade they can be.

It is my conviction that the Inter-parliamentary Assembly of Orthodoxy with its reliance on the values of the Christian civilization can become an effective force capable of making its own contribution to the cause of peace settlement in hotbeds and to the solution of global problems of humanity. In this connection I call you to think over setting up in the Assembly a special mechanism for participation in peacemaking and humanitarian initiatives. I trust that the organization could become an agent of many peacemaking ideas, using the mandate of representative power in their countries.

The Russian Orthodox Church has consistently supported the work of the Assembly and I hope that our cooperation will bring forth good fruits.

I wish all the participants in the IAO Moscow meeting God’s help, fruitful work and success.

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