Moscow Patriarchate delegation takes part in preparing a meeting of Primates of Orthodox Churches



March 3, 2014 – With a blessing of His Holiness Patriarch Kirill of Moscow and All Russia, a delegation of the Moscow Patriarchate led by the chairman of the Department for External Church Relations, Metropolitan Hilarion of Volokolamsk, arrived in Istanbul for preparation of a meeting (synaxis) of the Primates of the Orthodox Churches to be held from March 5 to 9, 2014, at the invitation of Patriarch Bartholomew of Constantinople.

The DECR chairman is accompanied by his deputy, Archpriest Nikolay Balashov, and Deacon Anatoly Churyakov, DECR staff. At the airport in Istanbul, they were met by representatives of the Patriarchate of Constantinople and the

Russian General Consulate in Istanbul.

On March 4, the preparatory commission began its work at the Patriarchate of Constantinople. It was chaired by Metropolitan John of Pergamon and attended by hierarchs from Patriarchates of Alexandria, Antioch, Jerusalem, Georgian, Serbia, Romania and Bulgaria, the Churches of Cyprus, Greece, Albania and Poland.

In his first speech of greetings, Metropolitan Hilarion said:

“I would like thank His Holiness Patriarch Bartholomew for the invitation to this important meeting for us to exchange opinions and prepare a meeting of the Primate of the Orthodox Churches.

I thank the chairman of this group, Metropolitan John of Pergamon, for Your Eminence’s care to introduce us to the themes of the meeting and to remind us of the main problems facing the world Orthodoxy today.

Indeed, the problem of preservation of Christianity in the Middle East is a number one problem for us all, as in the recent years the Middle East has seen the developments that threaten the very survival of Christianity in that land where it was born and has existed for two thousand years now and where Christians for centuries have got along with Muslims and people of other religions.

We all hear about the events of the so-called Arab Spring, when the political regime in this or that country is overthrown with the help of external forces and then chaos develops instead of democracy in the name of which the previous power had been overthrown. Then extremist forces show their head, attacking Christians, exterminating them, kidnapping priests, bishops, nuns, destroying Christian churches and doing everything to make those who believe in Christ to leave the Middle East.

We are eye-witnesses to this tragedy. It is often hushed up in the mass media. We as representatives of Local Orthodox Churches must do everything that depends on us to draw the attention of the world community to this situation, to express solidarity with our persecuted brothers and sisters so that the genocide of Christians in the Middle East could be stopped, those kidnapped released and those who had to leave their homes could return to them.

An especially grave situation has hit the Most Holy Church of Antioch, and we should express solidarity with our sister Church and to demand again the release of our kidnapped brothers, Metropolitans Paul and John Ibrahim, whom we all know very well and for whom we are praying. Soon it will be a year of their captivity in an unknown place.

Your Eminence, I fully agree with what you have said about the importance of preparations for a Pan-Orthodox Council. Indeed, it has been in preparations for over fifty years now, and many of us wonder how long this preparation is still to last. Perhaps, in order to hold a Council in an appropriate way we should first of all think about speeding up the pace of the preparations and setting up a mechanism to facilitate the fulfilment of our tasks, namely, to draft the Council's agenda and procedure of the Council, to determine who and how will be represented at it and who and how will make decisions.

I also agree with you that some documents which have been already prepared and negotiated at a certain state now need to be revised and edited and very substantially at that, considering that the world has changed. New realities have developed, and if bishops of Local Orthodox Churches assemble for a Council to participate in an event that has not been in the life of the Orthodox Church for over a thousand years, we certainly must say to our flock and the whole world about the problems of our concern today, not those which Orthodox Churches worried about in the 70s and 80s. For this reason – I think Primates will speak about it – the idea expressed in its time for setting up a small working group, an inter-Orthodox secretariat, to work on the texts, to propose the Council's agenda and procedure, would be very timely.

The Russian Orthodox Church is ready as before to take part in this process of preparations for the Council, and to contribute her intellectual resources in the reflection on problems facing us.

I would like to wish great success to this preparatory meeting and certainly to the meeting of Primates of the Local Orthodox Churches".

DECR Communication Service

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