



## **Mr. Leonid Kalashnikov, deputy chairman of State Duma Committee on International Affairs, meets with Christian hierarchs from Syria**



On 9 October 2013, Mr. Leonid Kalashnikov, first deputy chairman of the Russian State Duma Committee on International Affairs, met with Christian hierarchs from Syria.

Taking part in the meeting were Bishop Isaac of Apameia, vicar of the Damascus diocese (Patriarchate of Antioch); Archbishop Joseph Absi (Melkite Greek Catholic Church); Bishop Armash Nalbandian (Armenian Apostolic Church, Catholicosate of Etchmiadzin); Archbishop Mor Silwanos Butros (Peter) al-Ni'meh (Syriac Orthodox Church); Archbishop Samir Nassar (Maronite Church); Hieromonk Stefan (Igumnov), staff member of the Secretariat for Inter-Orthodox Relations of the Moscow Patriarchate's Department for External Church Relations; Mr. Boris Zarankin, senior advisor of the State Duma Committee on International Affairs; and Mr. Dmitry Pchelyakov, deputy head of the Executive Office of the State Duma Committee on International Affairs.

Mr. Kalashnikov noted the unquestionable importance of the Syrian religious and historical sites for the world culture. Having expressed his sympathy to the members of the Syrian delegation over the ongoing hostilities, Mr. Kalashnikov assured them that Russia has been making every possible effort to stabilize the situation in Syria with the assistance of the United Nations and to prevent the war from growing into an international conflict. The deputy chairman of the Russian State Duma Committee on International Affairs wished Syrian hierarchs strength and courage.

On behalf of the Syrian people, Archbishop Mor Silwanos Butros al-Ni'meh expressed gratitude to the people of Russia and to the Russian Orthodox Church for their sympathy and support and emphasized that the war in Syria affected all its citizens. So far, sixty Christian churches have been destroyed in Homs, Aleppo, Maalula and other cities and towns. Many Christians in these cities have already died and die every day.

The Syrian archpastor expressed his hope that Syria would remain home for Christians and noted with regret that half a million Christians have already left their homeland.

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