# Bishops' Council of Russian Orthodox Church opens in Moscow

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The Bishops' Council of the Russian Orthodox Churches began its work at the Hall of Church Councils in the Cathedral of Christ the Saviour on 2 February 2013. 290 archpastors from 247 dioceses of the Russian Orthodox Church (ROC) were invited to take part in the Council. They arrived from Russia, Ukraine, Belarus, Moldova, Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Kirghistan, Latvia, Lithuania, Tadjikistan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, Estonia, and from some far abroad countries in which the ROC dioceses exist.

The sessions were preceded by the Divine Liturgy celebrated in the Cathedral of Christ the Saviour.

Under the Statute of the Russian Orthodox Church, His Holiness the Patriarch of Moscow and All Russia chairs the Bishops' Council.

The Presidium consists of the permanent members of the Holy Synod: Metropolitan Vladimir of Kiev and All Ukraine; Metropolitan Vladimir of St. Petersburg and Ladoga; Metropolitan Philaret of Minsk and Slutsk, Patriarchal Exarch of All Belarus; Metropolitan Juvenaly of Krutitsy and Kolomna; Metropolitan Vladimir of Kishinev and All Moldova; Metropolitan Varsonofiy of Saransk and Mordovia, Chancellor of the Moscow Patriarchate; Metropolitan Hilarion of Volokolamsk, Chairman of the Moscow Patriarchate' Department for External Church Relations; and Metropolitan Aleksandr of Astana and Kazakhstan and Metropolitan Vikentiy of Central Asia who were included as permanent members by the decision of the Holy Synod of 5 October 2011pending approval by the Bishops' Council.

Invited to the Presidium were Metropolitan Vladimir of Omsk and Tavricheskoye, Metropolitan Veniamin of Penza and Nizhniy Lomov, Archbishop Mark of Hust and Vinogradov, Archbishop Simon of Murmansk and Monchegorsk, and Bishop Savva of Tiraspol and Dubossary who take part in the winter session of the Synod.

Also, by the decision of the Holy Synod of 30 January 2013 (Minutes 8), invited to the Presidium were Metropolitan Daniel of Tokyo and All Japan, Metropolitan Hilarion of Eastern America and New York, Metropolitan Aleksandr of Riga and All Latvia and Metropolitan Korniliy of Tallinn and All Estonia due to the importance of participation of the autonomous and self-governing parts of the Moscow Patriarchate in the leadership of the Bishops' Council.

The Bishops' Council consists of the diocesan bishops and vicar bishops who head Synodal departments and theological academies or have canonical jurisdiction over parishes in their charge. Under the Statute of the Russian Orthodox Church, certain vicar bishops can attend the Bishops' Council's session without the right of casting vote.

Prayer service was celebrated before to the first plenary session. His Holiness Patriarch Kirill read an introductory prayer.

The4 participants submitted the rules of procedure, adopted the agenda and programme of the Council; approved credentials and drafting commissions and the counting board, and elected the Council's secretary.

His Holiness Patriarch Kirill of Moscow and All Russia will present a report on the life and activities of the Russian Orthodox Church.

The participants will consider five draft documents elaborated by the Inter-Council Presence.

On 30 January 2013, the Holy Synod resolved to present to the Bishops' Council draft Regulations for material and social support of priests, church workers and staff of religious organizations of the Russian Orthodox Church and of members of their families; and a draft of alterations and amendments to the Statute that should be introduced following the decisions of the Holy Synod taken in 2011-12 and in compliance with assignments given by the Bishops' Council of 2011. Also, members of the Council will discuss a draft regulation on the awards of the Russian Orthodox Church.

Greetings to the Council were sent by Russian President Vladimir Putin, Ukrainian President Viktor Yanukovich, Byelorussian President Alexander Lukashenko, and Moldavian Prime Minister Vladimir Filat.

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