



**THE RUSSIAN ORTHODOX CHURCH**

Department for External Church Relations

## **Major Orthodox public forum, 21st International Christmas Readings, opens in Moscow**

January 24, 2013 – the 21<sup>st</sup> International Christmas Educational Readings were opened by His Holiness Patriarch Kirill of Moscow and All Russia at the State Kremlin Palace. This year the theme of the Reading is Traditional Values and the Modern World.

Sitting in the presidium of the forum, along with prominent hierarchs of the Russian Orthodox Church, are high-ranking state officials including Head of the Presidential Administration S. Ivanov, Vice-chairman of the State Duma A. Torshin, Deputy Chair of the State Duma L. Shvetsova, Minister of Education and Science D. Livanov, Minister of Culture V. Medinsky, Presidential Envoy for Central Russia A. Beglov, Chairman of the State Duma Committee for Public and Religious Organizations Ya. Nilov, Moscow Deputy Mayor for Regional Security and Information Policy A. Gorbenko, President of the Russian Academy of Education N. Nikandrov.

The Christmas Readings are attended by bishops of the Russian Orthodox Church, representatives of Local Orthodox Churches, state officials and public leaders, Russian and foreign scholars, staff of synodal structures, and teachers of secular and church educational institutions.

The Primate of the Russian Orthodox Church addressed the meeting.

Messages of greetings were brought from President V. Putin, Prime Minister D. Medvedev, Council of the Federation Speaker V. Matvienko, State Duma Speaker S. Naryshkin and Moscow Mayor S. Sobyenin.

The gathering was also addressed by D. Livanov, V. Medinski and Metropolitan Mercury of Rostov and

Novocherkassk, chairman of the Department for Religious Education and Catechism.

During the opening session there was an award ceremony for the winners of the Russian National Contest 'For the Teacher's Moral Feat'. The contest is held annually by the Ministry of Education and Science and the ROC Department for Religious Education and Catechism with the support of Presidential Envoys in federal regions.

After the award ceremony, a speech was made by President of the Russian Academy of Education N. Nikandrov. Metropolitan Hilarion of Volokolamsk, head of the Department for External Church Relations, presented a paper on 'Traditional Values – a Challenge to the Secular Worldview'.

In conclusion of the opening session, His Holiness Patriarch Kirill remarked that the task of the Russian Orthodox Church was to bear witness tracing back to the apostolic times and preserved by the church tradition. 'I should say that in recent times we see certain signs showing that many of those who were born and raised in completely different traditions and in a different moral climate take in this witness with consideration and interest. God grant that the Christmas Readings may help us all to come to a better understanding of all that is associated with the main theme of these Readings – with the meaning, substance and importance of traditional moral God-established values for human life. God grant that this may give us an opportunity for reflecting on the importance of tradition itself as a mechanism of handing down values from generation to generation, from culture to culture and for being asserted in this understanding', His Holiness noted, reminding the audience again of the special importance of church witness before the modern world.

The 21<sup>st</sup> International Christmas Readings will be held till January 26 and will end in the Divine Liturgy to be celebrated at the Church of Christ the Saviour on Sunday, January 27.

According to the Patriarchal Press Service, the forum is attended by over 8 thousand people including representatives of 148 dioceses of the Russian Orthodox Church in Russia, Belarus, Ukraine, Moldova,

Latvia, Estonia, Kazakhstan, Kirgizia, Azerbaijan, Uzbekistan, Great Britain, Germany, Canada, France, and Switzerland. Among the participants are also delegations from Greece and Georgia. Fifty four bishops will chair the work of conferences, sections and round tables.

For the first time the Christmas Readings are accompanied by parliamentary meetings in the State Duma devoted to topical issues of societal life.

*DECR Communication Service*

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