Patriarch Kirill meets with Israel's Chief Rabbi Yona Metzger

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November 11, 2012 – His Holiness Patriarch Kirill met with Israel's Chief Rabbi Yona Metzger at the Chief Rabbinate's office.

They discussed the situation of Christians in some Middle East countries. 'What happens in the Middle East and North Africa today should draw the attention of religious leaders so that they could make a reconciling contribution to the pacification of the very restless political atmosphere in the region', Patriarch Kirill said. 'We as religious communities have not exhausted our peacemaking potential', he said, adding, 'I believe at present the interreligious consultations and dialogues on these issues should be made more intensive'.

Another problem, in Patriarch Kirill's opinion, is the ousting of religion from public life and aggressive secularism. But believers cannot to restrict their religious motivation to private life alone as this is a principle on which the whole system of dialogue between religion and society is built. Patriarch Kirill is confident that believers confessing different religions can discuss many problems together. He cited the Orthodox-Catholic-Jewish conference on the Family in Crisis which took place last December in Vienna. Such initiatives should be developed with the aim to elaborate a common point of view in face of the secular society, Patriarch Kirill said.

There are good relations developing between Russia and Israel, the Primate of the Russian Church noted. He said the Holy Land like no other country in the world makes Russian people feel close to their own homeland as Russian speech can be heard there as often as it is in Moscow streets. Another factor conducive to the development of good relations is the growing flow of pilgrims to the Holy Land. 'The fact that Israel, Russia and Ukraine have agreed to introduce visa-free travel is very helpful for developing pilgrimage, which will now involve not dozens but perhaps hundreds of thousands of pilgrims', Patriarch Kirill said.

He made a special mention of the fact that pilgrimage has, along with a religious, important social and political dimension since it contributes to stronger relations between countries and people. ‘The Holy Land is now much closer to hundreds of thousands of Russians after they have visited its holy places. It is a very important example of how the religious factor can contribute to the development between countries and people’, he said.

Rabbi Yona Metzger, in his turn, expressed concern for the situation of the Christian population in some countries in the Middle East, who have to flee the region, stressing, ‘I share the concern for the situation of religious minorities primarily Christian ones in the countries in which ‘the Arab Spring’ is underway.

It was noted that ungrounded and aggressive criticism against believers has been often voiced today in the mass media. It also happens in Russia. Rabbi Yona Metzger called upon believers who confess various religions to unite and give ‘an adequate response to those who trample upon the principles of morality and ethics’.

Noting the contribution His Holiness Kirill, ‘known to the whole world as a wise and active man and charismatic personality’, made to dialogue between religions, the rabbi proposed that the Primate of the Russian Church initiate the convening a congress in Moscow devoted to interreligious relations.

Patriarch Kirill presented Rabbi Yona Metzger with a copy of the Hebrew version of his book ‘Freedom and Responsibility’.

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