Metropolitan Hilarion's address to Interdepartmental Working Group for Preventing HIV-infection and Drug Addiction

On October 5, 2012, the Interdepartmental Working Group for Coordinating Efforts to Prevent HIV infection and Drug Addiction and to provide palliative aid and support to people living with HIV held its first meeting at the Moscow Patriarchate's department for external church relations (DECR).

Metropolitan Hilarion of Volokolamsk, DECR chairman, welcomed the participants with the following remarks:

'Distinguished members of the Interdepartmental Working Group,

'We are aware of how serious the problem of the spreading of HIV infection and drug addiction is for our country. Today, the number of registered HIV-infected people has exceeded 700.000. The number of people who use drugs on a regular basis has approached 3 million. It is a whole city of drug addicts and HIV-infected people in a country in which the population situation is recognized as one of the major risks for her further development.

'There is no need to explain to the specialists who have gathered here that it is simply unprofessional to put the blame for the drug addiction on errors committed by the law enforcement, healthcare bodies or on economic factors. In case of the drug addiction epidemic and the ensuing epidemic of HIV, what we see is the social visualization of our society's hidden vices, namely, immorality, lack of spirituality, aggression and the failure to protect the weak. It is here that all the shortcomings of the education system for the younger generation both in family and school are manifested most vividly and fearfully.

‘It is not HIV infection and drug addiction that present in themselves a threat to the national security and national development. Rather, the key threat comes from the prospect of moral degradation of our society and the main risk lies in our society’s unwillingness to see its own spiritual illnesses and it means its failure to get ready for taking measures for moral improvement.

‘At the same time, we are pleased to see that there are healthy forces in the state and society, which are clearly aware of these threats and risks and ready to take action together. It is the ability of Russian society to rally in face of a serious threat and to take action together that has proved to be the most important factor of our nation’s survival in grave situations in history.

‘A good example of such unity has been given by state, public and church organizations which have united efforts to oppose the spreading of HIV/AIDS and drug addiction, to prevent risk behaviours among the youth and to provide social and spiritual rehabilitation to drug users and care for HIV-infected people. In recent years, not a small number of cooperation projects have been implemented to bring forth good fruits.

‘Among these fruits is the palliative aid and care for HIV-infected people offered through the joint efforts of Orthodox nurses, clergy and the AIDS centers and hospital workers. I would also like to point to the programs for preventing HIV infection and deviant behaviour among teenagers and youth developed under the auspices of the Church and supported by the State Anti-Drug Committee and carried out in regions in cooperation with local education departments. Good fruits have been brought by the cooperation between the Church and state addictologists in the rehabilitation of those dependent on drugs. The establishment of church rehabilitation centers for drug addicts is an important and active thrust in the social service of many dioceses.

‘In recent months we have witnessed growing criticism coming from a certain part of our society. Subjected to tough criticism are state authorities and subjected to undeserved criticism is the Church which is alleged to seek the clericalization of society and interpenetration of church and state. In doing so, unscrupulous media and social network activists have over-stressed negative examples, studiously

holding back all the good and socially significant and positive things done by the Church, in particular, in her cooperation with the state and society.

‘It is very important for us to show that partnership between church, state and public organizations can be efficient and effective and at the same time socially responsible and mobilizing as well as correct from the point of view of secular norms.

‘Using this opportunity, I would like to thank the representatives of ministries and departments who have accepted the invitation to join the working group. We very much expect that the cooperation initiated in preventing the spreading of HIV infection and drug addiction will fruitfully develop for the benefit of our country and hope that the efforts of your working group will become a great help in this endeavour. I wish you God’s help in your work.’

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