



## **His Holiness Patriarch Kirill completes his official visit to the Patriarchate of Antioch**

On 15 November 2011, His Holiness Patriarch Kirill of Moscow and All Russia completed his official visit to the Orthodox Church of Antioch.

The visit began on November 12, when His Holiness and his suite arrived in Damascus. Accompanying the Primate of the Russian Orthodox Church were Metropolitan Hilarion of Volokolamsk, chairman of the Moscow Patriarchate's Department for External Church Relations (DECR); Bishop Sergiy of Solnechnogorsk, head of the Moscow Patriarchate's Administrative Secretariat; archpriest Nikolai Balashov, DECR deputy chairman; protodeacon Vladimir Nazarkin, assistant to the DECR chairman, and acting head of the Patriarch's personal secretariat, M. Kuksov. Archbishop Nifon of Philippiopolis, representative of the Patriarch of Antioch and All the East to the Patriarch of Moscow and All Russia, arrived from Moscow, too.

His Holiness Patriarch Kirill was met at the airport by His Beatitude Patriarch Ignatius IV of the Great City of Antioch and All the East; other hierarchs of the Orthodox Church of Antioch; archimandrite Alexander (Yelisov), representative of the Patriarch of Moscow and All Russia to the Patriarch of Antioch; representatives of the Syrian authorities; and H. E. Azamat Kulmuhametov, Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of the Russian Federation to the Syrian Arab Republic.

During his talk with the journalists at the airport His Holiness Patriarch Kirill noted that he goes on such visits to the Local Orthodox Churches in the order prescribed by the dyptich – the list of the heads of the Churches.

From the airport His Holiness proceeded to the Cathedral of the Assumption, where he prayed at moleben celebrated by His Beatitude Patriarch Ignatios and addressed the worshippers.

His Holiness visited the Church of St. Ignatius the God-Bearer in Damascus – the Representation of the Patriarch of Moscow and All Russia to the Patriarch of the Great City of Antioch and All the East. Patriarch Kirill met with many compatriots, natives of Russia, Ukraine, Belarus, and other countries in canonical territory of the Moscow Patriarchate, for whom Syria is the place of habitual or temporary residence.

That same day, His Holiness met with H.E. Adel Safar, head of the government of the Syrian Arab Republic, at his residence.

On Sunday, November 13, His Beatitude Patriarch Ignatius and His Holiness Patriarch Kirill officiated at the Divine Liturgy in the Cathedral of the Assumption. The service was celebrated in the Arabic and Church Slavonic languages. The ceremony of official greeting took place at the Throne Hall of the Patriarchate.

Later in the day, His Holiness Patriarch Kirill met with H.E. Bashar al-Assad, President of Syria.

After the meeting, His Holiness Patriarch Kirill and His Beatitude Patriarch Ignatius took part in the opening of the exhibition dedicated to the relations between the Patriarchate of Antioch and the Russian Orthodox Church and in the presentation of Patriarch Kirill's book 'Freedom and Responsibility' in the Arabic language.

That same day, His Holiness met and talked with Sheikh Ahmed Badr Ad-din Hassoun, Grand Mufti of Syria, and with Muhammad Abd-as-Sattar Sayyed, Minister of Awqaf of the Syrian Arab Republic.

Later, His Holiness Patriarch Kirill and his suite departed Damascus for Beirut.

On November 14, the Primate of the Russian Orthodox Church visited the Cathedral of St. George and led a prayer service there.

After the prayer service, His Holiness Patriarch Kirill met with General Michel Suleiman, President of the Republic of Lebanon.

The Primate of the Russian Orthodox Church met with the residents of Lebanon who have been granted award by the Russian Orthodox Church.

On November 15, His Holiness met with the Maronite Patriarch Béchara Boutros Raï. They were joined in the meeting by other Catholic Patriarchs of the East.

His Holiness Patriarch Kirill concluded his stay in Lebanon by a visit to the Balamand Monastery and meeting with the faculty and student of the University of Balamand.

During the days of his visit to the Orthodox Church of Antioch, His Holiness Patriarch Kirill and His Beatitude Patriarch Ignatius discussed the development of bilateral and Pan-Orthodox cooperation, especially in connection with the preparation for the Pan-Orthodox Council, noting a high level of mutual understanding and consent. The Primate shares the views on the prospects of convening the Council and on essential conditions for successful progress of the pre-Council process. They also discussed

questions of pastoral approach to the spiritual care for the believers living far from their homeland, as well as cooperation in education and pilgrimage.

His Holiness Patriarch Kirill thanked His Beatitude Patriarch Ignatius for fraternal hospitality accorded to him and his suite during their visit to the Patriarchate of Antioch and invited Patriarch Ignatius to return an official visit to the Moscow Patriarchate.

His Holiness thanked the president and faculty of the University of Balamand for establishing a unique school, which so aptly combines vertical and horizontal dimensions of intellectual life.

The delegation of the Russian Orthodox Church led by His Holiness Patriarch Kirill left Balamand for the airport of Beirut and departed for Moscow.

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