Patriarch Kirill meets with President of Lebanon

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On November 14, 2011, the Primate of the Russian Orthodox Church met with President of the Republic of Lebanon, Gen. Michel Suleiman, in Beirut.

Participating in the meeting at the Presidential palace were also members of the Russian Orthodox Church delegation accompanying Patriarch Kirill on his official visit to the Patriarch of Antioch, including Metropolitan Hilarion of Volokolamsk, head of the Moscow Patriarchate's department for external church relations, Bishop Sergiy of Solnechnogorsk, head of the Moscow Patriarchate's administrative secretariat, and Archpriest Nikolay Balashov, DECR vice-chairman. Among the participants in the meeting were also Archbishop Niphon of Filippople, representative of the Patriarch of Great Antioch and All the East to the Patriarch of Moscow and All Russia, Archimandrite Alexander (Yelisov), representative of the Patriarch of Moscow and All Russia to the Patriarch of Great Antioch and All the East, and Mr. A. Zasypkin, Russia's ambassador to Lebanon.

In the talk with the head of the Lebanese state, Patriarch Kirill noted that he felt sincere joy when he saw Beirut restored after war destructions. He stressed that Lebanon was an example of a country in which there are many religious communities actively involved in the life of the society.

The secularized model of ordering public life fails to solve numerous problems facing people, and though some believe the system of relations between religions and confessions in Lebanon to be obsolete, its gives room for the religious motivation in political and public life while seeking to establish harmony between various worldviews, Patriarch Kirill said. He said the Lebanon's experience of building a mixed society made up of various communities was interesting and relevant to other countries which seek to work out for themselves a model of harmonious co-existence of various social groups.

Patriarch Kirill told the Lebanese president about the religious life, church-state and church-society relations and relations between religions in Russia. 'I am glad to meet you and talk with you, among other things, about interreligious dialogue', he said.

His Holiness also informed the president about Russia's experience in teaching the basics of religions in a multicultural and multi-religious society.

In greeting the patriarch and his delegation, Gen. Suleiman said he had warm memories of his meeting with Patriarch Kirill in Moscow and expressed hope that good relations between Russia and Lebanon

would continue. ‘I fully share your opinion about the role of religion of the life of society’ he said. He also shared his reflections on the fact that in the situation of globalization, when relations between nations develop and cultures actively penetrate one another, the principle of participation of all the population sections including minorities in the life of a country becomes ever more relevant.

Having noted the high value that His Holiness Patriarch Kirill gave to the Lebanese system of building society, Gen Suleiman said, ‘We might have been somewhat shy of it before but now, with growing extremism in the world, it has become evident that precisely this model may ensure a safe life for nations’.

Addressing the situation in the Middle East and North Africa, Gen. Michel Suleiman expressed hope for an end of violence in Arab countries and achievement of democratic transformations taking into account the opinions of all sections of the population.

On his part, Patriarch Kirill expressed concern over some aspects of the political situation in Arab countries. The escalation of tension in several countries of this region leads to bloodshed and people’s suffering. His Holiness recalled that the bloody revolution and civil war in the 20th century in Russia had terrible consequences which made themselves felt for many decades as the bloody conflict had split the nation into ‘the Whites’ and ‘the Reds’.

‘We are very much concerned for the situation of Christian communities in Egypt, Iraq and Lebanon. There is a radical growth of Christianophobia in other countries too’, he noted. Some countries need changes in public life but the question is by what means these changes will be achieved, he said. Changes in people’s life should be made peacefully, on the basis of public dialogue and without any interference from outside and with indispensible respect for the rights of minorities. ‘We are not indifferent to the fate of the Church of Antioch. We identify ourselves with her’.

Then the interlocutors were joined by hierarchs of the Christian communities in Lebanon including His Beatitude Patriarch Ignatios of Great Antioch and All the East, the Maronite Patriarch Beshara Boutros al-Rahi of Antioch and All the East, Greek-Catholic (Melkite) Patriarch Gregory III Laham, Syriac Catholic Patriarch Joseph II Yunan of Antioch, Metropolitan Elias of Beirut (Orthodox Church of Antioch), and Archbishop Gabriele Geordano Caccia, Papal Nuncio to Lebanon.

Addressing them, Patriarch Kirill continued speaking about the importance of the Lebanese model of relations between communities and the importance of its experience for discussion on the role of religious communities in the life of a society. His Holiness invited the representatives of Christian confession in Lebanon to take part in the discussion on the future order of the human civilization.

During the lunch given by the president of Lebanon in honour of the Primate of the Russian Orthodox Church, a lively talk concerning the dialogue of Christian confessions continued. The need to preserve a high level of communication between the Russian Orthodox Church and leaders of Christian communities in Lebanon was pointed out, especially in formulating a common stand on the problem of Christianophobia.

They also discussed the events in Egypt and other countries where Christians have been subjected to persecution. Patriarch Kirill stressed that the glaring cases of persecution against Christians could not be put to silence.

His Holiness also spoke about the experience of relations between religions in Russia and informed his interlocutors about the work of the Interreligious Council in Russia.

The Maronite Patriarch Beshara Boutros al-Rahi, in his turn, informed those present about the preparations for a summit of Christian and Muslim leaders in the Middle East.

DECR Communication Service

Source: https://mospat.ru/en/news/54933/