



Patriarch Kirill arrives in Lebanon

On November 13, 2011, in the course of his official visit to the Orthodox Church of Antioch, His Holiness Patriarch Kirill of Moscow and All Russia arrived in Lebanon from Syria.

His Holiness was met at the airport in Beirut by Metropolitan Elias of Beirut, Mr. Farid Makari, vice-president of the Lebanese Parliament, Mr. A. Zasytkin, Russia's ambassador to Lebanon, Mr. V. Koval, Ukraine's ambassador to Lebanon, Mr. Nikolaos Fouyas, minister-counsellor of the Greek embassy in Lebanon, and Archpriest Anatoly Yegorov, rector of the Russian parish in Beirut.

In his remarks to reporters of the local and overseas TV networks, Patriarch Kirill said in particular,

'I have been to Lebanon both at a time of peace and prosperity and at a time of war. I remember very well the time when the capital of Lebanon resembled Stalingrad destroyed during World War II. Now flying up to Beirut and seeing again a great number of lights and restored buildings, I rejoiced in the sight. The Lebanese people have used the time of peace to restore their cities and their country. I would like to congratulate you on these great achievements.

'I have come for an official visit to the Orthodox Church of Antioch after my ascension to the patriarchal see of Moscow. According to the old tradition, a newly-elected patriarch visits his fellow-primates of Local Orthodox Churches in the order established by the Orthodox Church. So today I have an opportunity to come to the Orthodox Church of Antioch. I have come from Syria to Beirut in order to pray together with the Orthodox faithful and to communicate with your people and your statesmen. I will also have an opportunity to visit the Balamand University and meet my compatriots.

'Primate visits are very important as through them relations between Local Orthodox Churches are maintained on the highest level. The relations between the Churches of Antioch and Russia have a long history which shows that we have always been together, in joys and sorrows. I hope that this visit will contribute to the development of good relations between both our two Churches and our nations'.

Asked about his impressions of the meeting he had on the same day with President Bashar al-Assad of Syria, Patriarch Kirill said,

'Today I have had an opportunity to meet with President Assad. I am not acting as a political leader or a diplomat or a political envoy of Russia or any other country but as Patriarch of the Russian Orthodox Church. And my principal concern in this connection is what is going on in the Middle East with regard

to the situation of Christians. For many years, Syria has been an example of peaceful, calm and benevolent co-existence and cooperation between the Muslim and Christian communities. Naturally, we have apprehensions about what may happen. We saw what happened in Egypt and in Iraq. We see violence committed against Christians and growing Christianophobia. We see the destruction of relations which have taken so much effort and time to build. I very much hope that nothing like that will happen in Syria or Lebanon or any other country in the Middle East and in North Africa or in the world. The topic of Christian-Muslim relations is very important including for us in Russia. We have never had religious wars. For a thousand years we have lived in peace. We have developed a special style of relations between Orthodox people and Muslims. We cherish them and believe that it is only peace between religions, between cultures and ethnic groups that can preserve peace on our planet'.

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