



## Metropolitan Hilarion reads lecture at Moscow State Institute of International Relations

[gallery]

On October 24, 2011, Metropolitan Hilarion of Volokolamsk, head of the Moscow Patriarchate's department for external church relations and rector of the Sts Cyril and Methodius Post-Graduate School, visited the Moscow State Institute of International Relation (MGIMO University). At the new building of the university, he was welcomed by Ya. Skvortsov, dean of the department of international journalism, and Archpriest Igor Fomin, rector of the church of St. Alexander Nevsky under construction at MGIMO.

In his address to the faculty and students, Metropolitan Hilarion spoke about the history of the DECR, stressing that 'the subject matter of the department and that of the work you are to carry out overlap. Therefore, there are a lot of common problems we will have to settle together'.

He reminded the audience that the Department for External Church Relations was established in 1946, the first year after the Great Patriotic War. 'It was a time when the Church was given a respite for the first time after the severe persecution of the 20s and 30s. The Soviet power had set itself the task to eliminate the Church and this task was carried out by the most brutal and inhuman means, first of all through the physical elimination of the clergy and destruction of churches. Before the war, the Russian Orthodox Church had only four acting bishops left while before the 1917 Revolution they were over 300. Almost all the churches and all the monasteries and church schools were closed. But the situation changed during the war as the state leaders realized the importance of the Church in lifting up the spirit of the people. It was the time when the state policy towards the Church radically changed. Stalin invited three leading metropolitan of the Russian Orthodox Church to see him. It was an historical meeting which radically changed the status of the Church. The changes made it possible for her to establish structures ensuring her life and work in the post-war period not only inside but also outside the Soviet Union. The task of the Department for External Church Relations was first of all to establish contacts between the Russian Orthodox Church and the external world', the metropolitan said.

He specified that at present the DECR's responsibilities include maintaining inter-Christian and inter-Orthodox relations and cooperation with international organizations such as the UN, UNESCO and others and with expatriates in various countries. In the recent times, increasing attention has been given to interreligious dialogue due to the increasing persecution of Christians in various countries, especially in the Middle East. Speaking about the work of the DECR, Metropolitan Hilarion also highlighted the

preparations for a Pan-Orthodox Council. He spoke in detail about relations with the Roman Catholic Church as well as Protestant Churches and communities and the need for them to oppose terrorism and extremism together and to give a common response to such challenges of today as secularism and the liberalization of Christian teaching in some Protestant countries.

The time when the DECR was chaired by Metropolitan Kirill of Smolensk and Kaliningrad, now Patriarch of Moscow and All Russia, was a special period in its history, as he directed the department in the difficult years of perestroika. At that time the primary task of the DECR was to build relations with the state power. Metropolitan Kirill directed the work on the Basic Social Concept which was presented to the Jubilee Bishops' Council in 2000. The document sets forth the basic teaching on church-state relations and other problems of social importance today.

After his address, Metropolitan Hilarion answered numerous questions. The audience showed special interest in the way in which relations with the Russian Church Outside Russia developed after her reunification with the Moscow Patriarchate in 2007, prospects for healing the church schism in Ukraine, cooperation between the DECR and MGIMO, introduction of the Basic Religious Cultures and Secular Ethics discipline in school curriculum, and problems involved in ensuring safety for Orthodox shrines in Kosovo and Metochia.

In conclusion of the meeting, Metropolitan Hilarion gave to the MGIMO library a copy of the book published on the occasion of the 65<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Moscow Patriarchate's department for external church relations.

*DECR Communication Service*