Metropolitan Hilarion addresses faculty and students of Al-Azhar University in Cairo

[gallery]On 13 June 2011, in the course of his working visit to Egypt, Metropolitan Hilarion, chairman of the Moscow Patriarchate's Department for External Church Relations, visited Al-Azhar, the largest university in the Muslim world. Accompanying Metropolitan Hilarion were archimandrite Leonid (Gorbachev), representative of the Patriarch of Moscow and All Russia to the Patriarch of Alexandria and All Africa; Mr. I. Molotkov, minister-counsellor of the Russian Embassy in Egypt; and members of the delegation.

Metropolitan Hilarion was met at the University by the President of the World Association for Al-Azhar Graduates, Sheikh Muhammad Abd al-Fadil al-Qusi, and Sheikh Ali Abdel Baki. Metropolitan Hilarion met with the faculty and students at the conference hall.

Sheikh Muhammad Abd al-Fadil al-Qusi opened the meeting, saying, 'The correct understanding of religion can give the world that what it lacks and can also open the eyes of humanity and revive moral sentiments. The role of religion in society should be clearly defined.'

In his address, "Muslims and Christians in the modern world" translated into Arabic, Metropolitan Hilarion expressed his hope that his visit to Al-Azhar will continue a dialogue that has begun by His Holiness Patriarch Kirill of Moscow and All Russia during his visit to the University in April 2010.

Metropolitan Hilarion pointed out that fomenting of interreligious conflicts is of artificial nature and expressed his wish to think, together with the audience, about an answer of the people of faith to challenges of the secular world and about rebuffing attempts to foment intereligious conflicts made by those trying to distort old foundations. Among them are representatives of certain pseudo-Christians sects opposing interreligious dialogue or committing blasphemous assaults upon that what is sacred for Islam. Metropolitan Hilarion explained that these people should not be identified with the Orthodox and the Copts "who respect Islam and never ever offended anything sacred for the Muslims." The DECR chairman pointed out at the danger of extremism for both Christians and Muslims. As to the social teaching of Islam and Christianity, he mentioned the necessity of "opposing the destructive secular ideology and upholding family values and traditional morality."

The audience has shown profound interest in the lecture. Sheikh Muhammad Abd al-Fadil al-Qusi said that the listeners have found many points of common ground and called for joining efforts to oppose the

vices of contemporary society.

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