Address by Metropolitan Hilarion of Volokolamsk, head of the Moscow Patriarchate's department for external church relations, to the 19th International Educational Christmas Readings

Your Eminences and Graces,

Dear Fathers, Brothers and Sisters,

The Christmas Readings have become today a large-scale forum which enables representatives of both church and state to discuss very serious and significant problems. The discussions involve the mass media and reach out to a large audience.

The theme of the Readings this year is 'Church and State: Cooperation of Tackling Common Tasks.' It makes us to think about very many things. On the one hand, we can state with certainty that relations between state and church in Russia and in a number of other countries in the post-Soviet space have developed in a good and constructive vein making it possible to take common efforts for improving people's life. At the same time, it has to be admitted that we are to do perhaps much more than we have already done.

It concerns in particular the sphere of human life which involves moral issues. We should think over the educational mission that the Church is called to carry out and the importance of the Church's witness of the eternal truth of God and moral values before people.

Ethical issues acquire a special importance today in the concern for family ethics. In their addresses to this forum, participants have already touched upon the unfortunate situation which has developed in the social sphere in Russia and to this or that extent in other countries of the near abroad. This situation is a direct consequence of the erosion which has affected the traditional family way of life in the last decades. With regard to Russia it should be noted that it was the 1917 Revolution that dealt the first blow to this way of life. Then there were 70 years of atheism followed by 20 years of democracy entailing the imposition of the ideology of consumer society in our countries. Among the consequences is a terrible statistics reflecting an enormous number of abortions in our country and in the near abroad. It is a legitimized crime which takes away millions of lives.

We have heard that over one hundred thousand people die of drugs annually and some 25 percent of

the deaths among our population are caused by alcoholism. It is also known that today from 15 to 20 percent of the families in Russia are childless and in many cases the cause is previously performed abortion. The information has been published that there are 600 divorces for every 1000 marriages concluded in our country. These figures point to an extremely troubled situation which can be rectified only through the common efforts of all healthy forces in society.

It is commonly accepted that the basic reasons for abortion lie in the economic sphere. However, the principal reason for the killing of unborn children lies primarily in the spiritual and ethical realm as the bearing and raising of children have ceased to be a priority for most young couples. Priorities today are career, profession development and material success. One's idea of happiness includes a family with one or two children at most. With such a state of affairs, the population of our country will inevitably decrease, which is actually happening now as we lose hundreds of thousands of people every year. Sad to say, at present we can speak of our nation as dying out. And it happens in the first place for reasons of spiritual order, though of course they mingle with economic problems, such as social vulnerability of large families, insufficient support for motherhood, absence of a purposeful campaign for preventing abortion and week efforts for combating alcoholism and drug addiction.

A few days ago His Holiness Patriarch Kirill of Moscow and All Russia sent to the Russian leadership a number of proposals for the State Council's possible consideration of the problem of 'Public Policy for the Support of Family, Motherhood and Childhood in the Russian Federation.' These proposals concern not only the situation in Russia but are also important for other countries in the post-Soviet space. His Holiness calls upon the government to make the maintenance of pregnancy a priority and to this end to form a network of asylums for single mothers, to exclude abortion from the state medical insurance system so that abortion may not be performed at the expense of tax-payers and to establish a pregnancy crisis center at each maternity house with a professional psychologist on its staff. One of the most important proposals of His Holiness is to support a campaign in the mass media aimed to condemn abortion, to explain its negative consequences, to propagate motherhood, responsible fatherhood and large families.

Dear brothers and sisters, let us ask ourselves what can adults and children see while watching TV? Do they watch programmes that contribute to raising the prestige of motherhood, upholding family values, and propagating a healthy way of life and marital fidelity? Nothing of the kind. Through the mass media, our country is flooded by a stream of violence and immorality, propagation of depravity and consumerist attitude to life.

In order to bring witness about moral values, true standards and priorities in life to society, the mass media should be among those upholding family values. Yet, this will not happen without a goal-oriented state support of the main federal channels. The mass media are living by market laws. This means that

all newspapers and TV channels are to make such an information policy that would keep them in great demand as they exist largely thanks to commercials, but it is impossible to elaborate a policy directed at the support of family, motherhood, childhood, and struggle against abortions on commercial basis. Common efforts of the state, the Church and other traditional religious communities, the mass media and the system of education are needed.

Let us think of what our children are taught in schools today. Indeed, they learn the fundamentals of physics, chemistry, algebra, geometry, mother tongue and literature. This is important and essential to them. But how much time is given to moral values in the system of school education? It took a lot of efforts to introduce ‘The Basics of Orthodox Culture” to be taught in schools only on an experimental basis and only for one or two-years term.

I have recently visited Lithuania. I know this country well as I lived there for five years when I was a priest of the Vilnius diocese. I am aware of the problems in this country similar to the Russian problems. The difference is that the Lithuanian problems are seen more clearly and vividly as Lithuania is a very small country. The Lithuanians, including politicians, speak of themselves as of a dying-out nation. A reason of this troubled situation lies in a great number of abortions and divorces, like in Russia, and even a religious education in the secondary educational institutions cannot change the situation. I am confident, however, that without religious education in schools the situation would have been much worse.

All of us, wherever the Lord has judged us to live, work and minister, are called to exert efforts to help our society understand the importance of family, support of motherhood, and struggle against abortions. All healthy forces of society should be involved in this work; the Church and traditional religious communities, the mass media and the systems of secondary and higher education should combine their efforts. All people should understand that the survival of our country and our nation is at stake.

May God grant us to see favourable changes. May God grant us to wait till all people would think not only of their own life, but of the future of their country, and start a family on the basis of traditional vision of family relations, motherhood, fatherhood, and marital fidelity. May God grant us to see a drastic reduction of abortions, reduce of death-rate due to alcohol and drug addiction, and a radical change in the demographic situation that sooner or later would drive our nation to grave if the present trends remain unchanged.

Thank your for your attention.

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