



His Holiness Patriarch Kirill meets with H.E. Ricardo Alarcón de Quesada, President of National Assembly of People's Power of the Republic of Cuba

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On 30 November 2010, His Holiness Patriarch Kirill of Moscow and All Russia met with H.E. Ricardo Alarcón de Quesada, President of the National Assembly of People's Power (Parliament) of the Republic of Cuba. The meeting took place at the Patriarch's working residence, Chisty side street.

The head of the Cuban Parliament was accompanied by H.E. Juan Valdez Figueroa the Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of Cuba to Russia; Mr. Miguel Alvarez Sánchez and Mr. Damian Garcia Carranza, counselor and assistant of H.E. de Quesada respectively; and Mr. Pedro Pozo Velásquez, first secretary of the Embassy of Cuba to Russia. Also taking part in the meeting were hegumen Philipp (Ryabykh), deputy chairman of the Moscow Patriarchate's Department for External Church Relations (DECR), and M. Palasio, a staff member of the DECR secretariat for far abroad countries.

The State Duma was represented by Ms. V. Vishnyakova, a principal adviser of the International Cooperation Department.

The Primate of the Russian Orthodox Church addressed the President of the National Assembly of People's Power of Cuba, saying: "Your Excellency, I am happy to welcome you in Moscow where you met twice with my predecessor, His Holiness Patriarch Alexy II. I know that you have visited the Laura of the Holy Trinity and St. Sergius, the spiritual centre of our Church and our country. Not so long ago, when I was a metropolitan, I visited Cuba and consecrated the Church of the Kazan Icon of the Mother of God in Havana. I retain a good memory of this event." His Holiness added that the church was built with active participation of the Cuban leadership, saying: "We are grateful for this important act as an important gesture to the Orthodox Christians."

His Holiness Patriarch Kirill described the level of relations between the Moscow Patriarchate and Cuba as a high one and underscored that these relations is a priority in the contacts of the Russian Orthodox Church with the countries of Latin America and the Caribbean. He noted a substantial contribution to the development of relations made by the Embassy of Cuba in Moscow and by H.E. Juan Valdez Figueroa.

His Holiness said further that the people of Russia and Cuba have been good friends for a long time.

Diplomatic relations between Russia and Cuba were established in the early 20th century, almost at the same time as the independent Cuba came into being. Cuban public of the 20th century was well acquainted with Russian culture thanks to the tours of theatres and musicians. "However, special relations have been established between Cuba and the USSR after the Revolution of 1959. After a cooldown of the 1990s, they were re-established on a new level. The Orthodox church of the Kazan Icon of the Mother of God in Havana is a symbol of friendship between the Russians and the Cubans."

His Holiness mentioned two major common features that create an affinity between them, such as the Christian foundation of their national cultures and an enhanced sense of social justice.

The Primate of the Russian Orthodox Church told his guests of the Annual Address to the Federal Assembly delivered by the Russian President Dmitry Medvedev and expressed his profound satisfaction with his main emphasis on a human person, mainly children and the youth. "This notion is very close to that of the Church. I believe that our common commitment to the idea of social justice give us a platform for close cooperation." His Holiness is confident that cooperation serves to common good.

The Russian-speaking diaspora is an important driving force of the Russian-Cuban relations. "Several thousands of our compatriots live in Cuba, having come from Russia, Ukraine, Moldova, and Belarus... They are our parishioners, and I am happy to see that the Orthodox church built in Havana is not only a place for worship, but also unites all these people. "Russian House" was set up at the church for contacts among the Russian-speaking people," His Holiness said.

He mentioned difficulties that the Cuban people encounter because of the economic blockade. "We have stated several times that blockade was an unjust action against Cuba and does not conform to political and economic realities of the 21st century. This is a vestige of the cold war, and it very important to remove it from relations between the states as soon as possible. Cuba has proved to the entire world that it could survive in spite of the blockade. Yet, it has the right to live as other states, having an opportunity to trade with them and develop contacts with the world."

The Russian Orthodox Church tries to promote relations between Russia and Cuba and between their people. The visit of the chairman of the Academic Board of the Cuban Institute of Ophthalmology Franc E. Martinez to the Academic Fyodorov Eye Microsurgery complex last March-April was a concrete result of these efforts. "We are willing to promote cultural contacts and contacts between experts in various branches of science, and, certainly, spiritual ties between our nations," His Holiness said.

H.E. Ricardo Alarcón de Quesada, President of the National Assembly of People's Power of the Republic of Cuba, thanked the Primate of the Russian Orthodox Church for the meeting and kind world.

His Holiness asked H.E. Ricardo Alarcón de Quesada to convey his heartfelt regards and good wishes to Fidel Castro and Raul Castro.

In conclusion of the meeting, the sides exchanges presents.

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