His Holiness Patriarch Kirill meets with Prime Minister of Lebanon Saad Hariri

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On 15 November 2010, His Holiness Patriarch Kirill of Moscow and All Russia met with the Prime Minister of the Republic of Lebanon, Saad Hariri, at the Patriarchal resident in Chisty side street.

Accompanying the Prime Minister were Minister of Defence Elias Murr, Minister of Justice Ibrahim Najjar, Minister of Culture Salim Warde, PM's senior adviser for foreign policy Mohammed Shatah, head of PM's secretariat Nader Hariri, head of International Affairs Unit Ms. Karma Ekmekji, and PM's advisor for Russian affairs George Shaaban.

Taking part in the meeting also were Russia's Special Presidential Representative for the Middle East and Deputy Foreign Minister Alexander Saltanov, and head of the Syria and Lebanon section of the Middles East and North Africa Department of the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs A. Panov.

Present at the meeting on behalf of the Russian Orthodox Church were hegumen Philipp (Ryabykh), deputy chairman of the Moscow Patriarchate's Department for External Church Relations, and hieromonk Stefan (Igumnov), a DECR staff member.

Also taking part in the meeting was Archbishop Nifon of Philippopolis, representative of the Patriarch of Antioch and All the East at the Patriarch of Moscow and All Russia.

His Holiness Patriarch Kirill cordially greeted the Prime Minister of Lebanon and said that that the Russian Orthodox Church has maintained good relations with the Lebanese for many years, and that these relations were developing.

"I recall me predecessor, Patriarch Alexy's meeting with the Lebanese parliamentarians, with your father and with you. I also recall my visits to Lebanon before the civil war and after it. I remember the blossoming Beirut and Beirut in ruins that could be compared with Stalingrad. We know how great was the damage that the civil war caused to Lebanon and highly appreciate the Lebanese leadership's efforts to solve the problems that provoked the murderous conflict."

Having acknowledged the important part played by Rafik al-Hariri, a renowned political leader and father of the incumbent Prime Minister, in ordering peaceful life in Lebanon, His Holiness Kirill said: "Our Church was full of indignation against the terrorist killing of your father in 2005, and we welcome the

United Nations Special Tribunal for Lebanon investigating this crime."

The Primate of the Russian Orthodox Church is convinced that both Lebanon and Syria are multireligious and multiethnic countries. Therefore, achievements in the field of interreligious and interethnic relations in both countries are of great importance for the entire world that has entered an epoch of globalization.

His Holiness Patriarch Kirill underscored that interreligious cooperation is important on both regional and local levels as well as on international level, including that of international organizations. UNESCO, being a special UN organization, could be an important base for dialogue. "Some well-known religious leaders launched an initiative to have a consultative body at UNESCO to help solve issues related to interreligious relations both in hot spots of the planet and in the entire world."

The Primate of the Russian Orthodox Church dwelt on the Middle East conflict, saying, "Lebanon is located in the place with a vivid Biblical tradition. This is a Biblical land, and we call I Holy Land. Therefore Christian believers feel particularly sad, as peace and justice have not yet prevailed on this land. Efforts of both religious communities and the state are very important for the solution of problems that feed the Middle East conflict."

Speaking about the Russian-Lebanese relations. His Holiness said that the pilgrims from Russia heading for the Holy Land have laid the foundation of these relations. It is well known that the Imperial Palestine Society, which supported the pilgrims, actively worked in Lebanon and rendered assistance to the local population in education and health care.

His Holiness continued to say, "There are some five thousand people in Lebanon who belong to the Russian Orthodox Church. Some of them are descendants of Russian families that were famous in Russia even before the Revolution. Some Orthodox Christians married the local inhabitants, and mixed marriages are a very important factor in our relations."

The Primate of the Russian Orthodox Church noted that the Patriarchate of Antioch that cares for the Orthodox Christians in Lebanon also cares for the Russian-speaking people living in the country. Besides, there is an Orthodox parish in Beirut. "We believe that good relations with the Orthodox Church of Antioch and the presence of the Russian Orthodox in Lebanon are factors that contribute to the development of relations between our countries and nations," His Holiness Patriarch Kirill emphasized and expressed his hope for the visit of the Prime Minister of Lebanon to serve this noble goal.

The prime Minister of Lebanon helped the Primate of the Russian Orthodox Church for warm reception. Saad Hariri told him that the Muslim and Christian communities take part in ordering life in Lebanon.

"We believe that co-existence of Muslims and Christians is absolutely necessary for Lebanon, as it is the only means thanks to which our country would not collapse and bury the entire nation beneath the ruins."

Saad Hariri underscored the importance of dialogue among religions and civilizations, saying that current problems are political ones rather than interreligious… Unfortunately, there are many people who do not understand religion and consider political problems as religious ones. We think that extremism is possible only in forgiveness.

The Prime Minister of Lebanon called the participation of the Russian Orthodox Church in the process of settlement of the Middle East conflict very important.

He thanked His Holiness for his support of justice in the investigation of his father's murder. Rafik al-Hariri personified aspirations for truth in the most part of the Arab world.

His Holiness Patriarch Kirill of Moscow and All Russia mentioned his plan to visit Lebanon during his visit to the Orthodox Church of Antioch.

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