



## Russia's Audit Chamber chairman S. Stepashin visits Holy Land

[gallery]

A Russian Federation delegation led by Mr. S. Stepashin, head of the Audit Chamber and chairman of the Imperial Orthodox Palestinian Society (IOPS), began their visit to the Holy Land on October 12, 2010, on the occasion of the 10000<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the founding of Jerico.

The delegation includes A. Saltanov, deputy foreign minister and presidential special representative in the Middle East, A. Rudakov, Russia's representative to the Palestinian National Authority, Archbishop Mark of Yegoryevsk, head of the Moscow Patriarchate's office for institutions abroad, and representatives of the IOPS.

On October 13, the delegation visited Jerico for the celebration marking the city's anniversary. Among the participants in the celebrations was Hegumen Feofan Lukyanov, deputy head of the Russian Ecclesiastical Mission. During the ceremony, Mr. Stepashin made a speech in which he emphasized that 'the spiritual traditions of peoples in Russia have been linked with the heritage of the Holy Land from time immemorial and today's anniversary celebrations therefore are of great importance for us'.

The delegation inspected the construction site of a Russian museum and park in Jerico located on the Russian plot of land with 'Zacchaeus' Tree'. During their tour, they saw the results of recent archaeological excavations carried out before the beginning of the construction. Among the artefacts found are mosaic floors and fragments of the 4<sup>th</sup> century buildings, old columns and capitals as well as a great number of coins from the period between the second and the 12<sup>th</sup> centuries.

On the same day, Mr. Stepashin met with Mr. Abbas, President of the Palestinian National Authority.

On October 14, the delegation was received in audience by Patriarch Theophilos of Jerusalem. The Russian Orthodox Church was represented by Archbishop Mark, Archimandrite Isidore, head of the Russian Ecclesiastical Mission, and his deputy, Hegumen Feofan. They discussed matters concerning the Imperial Orthodox Palestinian Society.

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