Metropolitan Hilarion's interview to "The Voice of Russia" Radio (8 October 2010)

His Holiness Patriarch Irinej of Serbia was enthroned in early October. Metropolitan Hilarion of Volokolamsk, head of the Moscow Patriarchate's Department for External Church Relations, attended the ceremony on behalf of the Russian Orthodox Church. Having returned home, he gave an interview to "The Voice of Russia."

- You have just returned from Kosovo. What are your impressions of the visit?

- My stay in Kosovo was very short this time, as I only took part in the enthronement of Patriarch Irinej of Serbia. However, I visited Kosovo a year ago and had an opportunity to get well acquainted with the life of this land. I have both positive and negative impressions. On the one hand, I saw remarkable monuments of the old Serbian culture and wonderful frescoes of the Decani and Gračanica monasteries. I saw people living there, performing their feat. On the other hand, I saw awful conditions in which they live, as the churches have been destroyed and local residents' attitude to the Serbs and Orthodoxy is utterly negative. As a matter of fact, I saw the land that used to be a cradle of Serbian Orthodoxy, but has been lost for the Church.

- What is the attitude to the Russian Orthodox Church and Russian people in Serbia and in Kosovo?

- The attitude is very good. Everybody knows that Russia has supported Serbia Russian Orthodoxy supported Serbian Orthodoxy throughout centuries up to now. His Holiness Patriarch Alexy II of Moscow and All Russia visited Serbia several times, and Patriarch Kirill, when he was metropolitan also often visited Serbia and Kosovo.

- Today many people are worried about Orthodox holy sites in Kosovo, a part of which had been lost forever during recent military conflicts. Is the Russian Orthodox Church prepared to help restore these word famous monuments and in what way?

- First of all, we highly appreciate a decision of the Russian state to give UNESCO money to restore the churches in Kosovo. Besides, the Russian Orthodox Church will do what she can for the Orthodox living in Kosovo, monks and nuns in particular. We talked with representatives of the Serbian Church; they wish to welcome our monks and nuns, let it be at least on the rotation method, for a year, or two, or three years, thus supporting their monasteries and convents. For instance, the Patriarchate of Peć, where the enthronement of the Patriarch took place, is a convent at present. Its hegumeness is ninety years old, and there are only a few sisters there. Certainly, our monasteries and convents could help to keep monasteries and convents in Kosovo in a proper state. I believe that the Russian Orthodox Church, having over eight hundred monasteries and convents could render fraternal support to the Serbian Orthodox Church in Kosovo.

- **Is there any special programme in the Russian Church on the pilgrimage of laymen to the holy sites in Kosovo? Thus not only monks, but also all believers could come there and do what they can to help.**

- The believers visit holy sites in Kosovo. I was happy to see several hundred pilgrims from Serbia and other countries at the enthronement of the Serbian Patriarch. It should be noted that many Russian Christians visit these holy sites, though it is rather difficult and even dangerous to do under the present circumstances. Some time should pass before the inhabitants of Kosovo begin to look at the recent events calmly. Even now, pilgrims traveling by bus are being attacked; stones are being thrown at them. This tension remains; it is heading in the air.

- What part does world Orthodoxy play, how can it help preserve the holy sites in Kosovo and also stabilize peace in the Balkans?

- I believe that all Orthodox Church should close their ranks and, together with the Serbian Church, elaborate a programme of aid to the monasteries and holy places in Kosovo. I can say that we in the Russian Orthodox Church are considering this issue. Since visiting Kosovo for the first time, I have been thinking about the necessity of a full-scale relief programme.

- **A tendency for improving relations between the Orthodox and the Catholics has been taking shape recently. Could it influence the well being in the Balkans, where the followers of these Christian confessions have been living side by side for centuries?**

- I think that the improvement of relations between the Orthodox and the Catholics would tell positively on the life in all countries where they live side by side. We discuss certain theological and theoretical problems and in our dialogue with the Catholics, but we should not forget about the real life of people and about our calling to help them. In this regard, any improvement of inter-confessional relations would

bring good to our believers.

- **You travel much representing the Russian Orthodox Church. What do you think about the attitude of people abroad to Orthodoxy and is the voice of the Russian Orthodox Church really heard?**

- As to the influence in the Western world, I think that the Russian Orthodox Church should not be compared with the Catholic Church. However, we do not have problems as it has at present, and therefore we are not sharply criticized in the Western mass media. Any time the Russian Orthodox Church vigorously states her position, her voice is heard throughout the world. It is difficult to tell how far they understand us, yet I think that we do not work for nothing, that the dialogue with our brothers, including non-Orthodox, is carried not in vain.

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