



**THE RUSSIAN ORTHODOX CHURCH**

Department for External Church Relations

## **Patriarch Kirill speaks at the 1st Conference of Imperial Orthodox Palestinian Society**

His Holiness Patriarch Kirill of Moscow and All Russia addressed the 1<sup>st</sup> Conference of the Imperial Orthodox Palestinian Society, which took place on June 10, 2010, at the conference hall of Russia's Chamber of Accounts.

He said in particular, 'The Imperial Orthodox Palestinian Society has become a unique phenomenon in today's life. Through the consolidated efforts of the Church, state leadership, various ministries, departments and Russia's intellectual elite, it has implemented significant projects in cultural, educational and humanitarian fields and in scientific research. The fruits of this cooperation are of great importance not only for our contemporaries but also for the coming generation. I believe it is an exceptional example of so large-scale cooperation, geographically and productively, between the Church, state and society'.

His Holiness also noted that Russia had a moral and historical right to share in the life of those who are bounded up by common history and faith by promoting cultural projects important for the whole Russian world. "The Society could be one of the non-governmental institutions which could really participate in the cultural, educational, scientific life, first of all, of the countries which are part of the 'Russian world'", he said.

In his address, the president of the Society and head of the Russian Federation Chamber of Accounts, Mr. Sergey Stepashin, stated that the Society should be seen as a powerful civil force in Russia, capable of uniting the nation spiritually around the fundamental, clear and age-long Christian values. He underscored that the Society was ready to carry out this important mission. 'Today the Society is Russia's reliable spiritual and moral outpost in the Holy Land, as guardian of the Orthodox self-awareness and steward of spiritual shrines, national spirit and social ideal. It is a powerful intellectual, patriotic, spiritual, humanitarian and social force acting in common national interests together with the Russian Orthodox Church and an effective mechanism of humanitarian influence in the Middles East as

it asserts Russian Orthodox presence in the region and represents an effective instrument of people's diplomacy'.

Mr. Stepashin also said that the Society set itself as one of its priorities to help organize pilgrimages to the Christian holy places in the Holy Land.

The conference summed up the work the Society had carried out for the last two years. Among the major projects implemented by the Society in that period was the return of the St. Sergius Metochion in Jerusalem to the Russian Orthodox Church and the construction of a museum compound in Jericho. In addition, it is planned to build an educational and cultural center in Bethlehem.

Among the participants in the conference were Moscow Mayor Yuri Luzhkov, Presidential Business Management Director V. Kozhin, Deputy Foreign Minister A. Saltanov, Bishop Tikhon of Podolsk, Synodal Information Director V. Legoida, Synodal Department for Church-Society Relations head Archpriest Vsevolod Chaplin, DECR vice-chairman Archpriest Nikolay Balashov, as well as prominent scholars and public figures inside and outside Russia.

Mr. Luzhkov was presented with the insignia of the Order of Grand Prince Sergiy Alexandrovich.

In the course of the conference, Patriarch Kirill presented Patriarchal honorary diplomas to members of the working group for saving the biblical fig tree.

*DECR Communication Service*

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