



President Medvedev awards Order of Friendship to Patriarch Ignatios IV of Antioch

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Russian President Dmitry Medvedev, during his visit to the Arab Republic of Syria, met with His Beatitude Ignatios IV, Patriarch of Great Antioch and All the East, on May 11, 2010.

His Beatitude Ignatios IV welcomed President Medvedev to his residence in Damascus with the Easter greeting. He said it was a great honour for him to receive such a high guest who represents the Orthodox people of Russia. His Beatitude stressed that the Russian Orthodox Church is the largest among the Local Orthodox Churches in the world, adding that the Patriarchates of Antioch and Moscow had a century-old history of close relations. 'We were and are together in any situation without exception. I am proud to have been for a long time a bridge for relationships between our fraternal Churches and our fraternal nations. We are proud of your influence and results of your work in our region. On many issues you share our positions', the patriarch said, explaining that he meant first of all the community of positions and attitudes held by the two Churches.

According to His Beatitude, this mutual understanding is fostered by his 'very old' personal relations with His Holiness Patriarch Kirill as well as his personal acquaintance with the three previous Patriarchs of Moscow and All Russia.

Patriarch Ignatios IV expressed a high appreciation of Russia's peace efforts in the Middle East region and stressed, 'I do not remember Russia's entering any war. But we know from the history of Russia that all the invaders who tried to attack the Russian State always found their graves in Russia'.

'We will invoke the grace of the Holy Spirit on the work of the Presidents of Russia and Syria so that the Lord may grant them unanimity for the benefit of our nations', His Holiness the Patriarch said in conclusion of his welcoming remarks.

In his response, the Russian President said, "Your Beatitude, it is a great joy for me to respond to your exclamation 'Christ is risen!' with 'Christ is risen indeed!' and to congratulate you on the forthcoming Day of the Lord's Ascension. He conveyed best wishes to Patriarch Ignatios IV from Patriarch Kirill of Moscow and All Russia.

Mr. Medvedev also emphasized the significance of the time-honoured relations between the sister Churches of Antioch and Russia, which are very important for the development of relations between

Russia and Syria. He made a special mention of the active position taken by the Orthodox Church of Antioch during World War II and the support this Church gave to Russia in her struggle with fascism. 'It is also one of the significant pages in the history of our relations', Mr. Medvedev said.

He made a high assessment of his negotiations with Syrian President Bashar Assad and expressed confidence that a new level reached in relations between Russia and Syria would 'certainly contribute to the inter-church dialogue'.

Mr. Medvedev also spoke about interreligious harmony, pointing to the good tradition of co-existence between the Muslim umma and the Christian community in Syria and to the positive experience of interreligious dialogue in Russia.

The president also expressed a high appreciation of the work of His Holiness and as a token of this appreciation and on the occasion of his recent 90th birthday awarded to the patriarch the Order of Friendship.

The meeting concluded with a visit to the Cathedral of the Assumption, where Mr. Medvedev presented the Patriarch of Antioch with an icon of Our Lady of Kazan.

DECR Communication Service

with reference to the website of the President of Russia

and the press service of the Patriarch of Moscow Representation to the Patriarch of Antioch

Source: <https://mospat.ru/en/news/57285/>