Patriarch Kirill meets with Egyptian People's Assembly President Fathi Sourour

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On April 11, 2010, His Holiness Patriarch Kirill of Moscow and All Russia met with Egyptian People's Assembly President Fathi Sourour, who is also president of the Egypt-Russia Society, at the Russian Ambassador's residence. Participating in the meeting were also Pope and Patriarch Theodore II of Alexandria and All Africa and Russian Ambassador to Egypt M. Bogdanov.

Mr. Sourour spoke among other things about interreligious dialogue, relations between Christian and Islamic communities and opposition to extremism. He said in particular that 'there is no sense in progress if there is no firm faith and power of the spirit. The participation of the Russian Orthodox Church in interreligious dialogue contributes to the building of mutual understanding in the Middle East'.

According to Mr. Sourour, faithfulness to ancient traditions is one of the distinctive features of the Orthodox Church as it observes the principles laid in Christianity from its inception. 'When I am next to you, a religious man, I feel light coming from you', he admitted.

Patriarch Kirill agreed with Mr. Sourour's statements and stressed that the USSR in its relations with the Arab world lost much because of its atheistic attitudes.

'The experience of life in an atheistic society has taught many things to us and our people. We put our trust in science, the army might, the power of the authority and wanted to build a prosperous and just society. We achieved much but failed to hold it because there was no faith, and the absence of faith generates a crisis of the personality. That is why so, seemingly, powerful a state disintegrated overnight, without a singe shot', he said.

Patriarch Kirill also emphasized the role of the religious factor in settling conflicts in hot spots and spoke about the dialogue with the UN concerning the establishment of an expert council of authoritative religious leaders. He also referred to the desirability of taking into account the religious factor in Russian-Egyptian relations.

Mr. Sourour expressed full support for the idea of setting up an expert body under the UN for interreligious relations. 'Egypt fully supports this project', he stated.

In the discussion on the Middle East peace settlement Mr. Sourour pointed to the special importance of ensuring a free access to places held sacred by major world religions and the need to consider the importance of particular holy places for respective religious communities. There was also a meaningful discussion on the jurisdiction of holy places. As Patriarch Kirill stressed, the question of who will take care of the world religions' holy places is one of the principal problems of a settlement in the Middle East settlement.

In the course of the talk held in a spirit of mutual understanding and consent, Patriarch Kirill also spoke about the experience of dialogue with representatives of Islam in Russia. He conveyed the best wishes of full recovery to Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak who is undergoing rehabilitation after an operation. Patriarch Kirill expressed a high appreciation of the role played by President Mubarak in the efforts to build prosperous Egypt, to achieve social harmony and interreligious peace in the country and to develop international relations on the basis of mutual respect and dialogue of cultures.

In conclusion of the meeting, Patriarch Kirill presented Mr. Sourour with candlesticks produced by the Moscow Patriarchate's art shops.

Present at the reception given in honour of His Holiness Patriarch Kirill of Moscow and All Russia by the Russian Embassy were the Moscow Patriarchate official delegation, diplomats of Ukraine, Belarus and Kazakhstan, the vice president and the general secretary of the Egypt-Russia Society and other officials. Speakers at the reception greeted Patriarch Kirill, noting a special importance of his visit to Egypt and pointing to the outstanding role of the Russian Church and its Primate in building societal life on ethical principals.

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