Patriarch Kirill meets with Cuban Ambassador Juan Valdes Figueroa and chairman of the Cuban Institute of Ophthalmology academic council Dr. E. Martinez

His Holiness Patriarch Kirill of Moscow and All Russia met with Cuban Ambassador to Russia Juan Valdes Figueroa and chairman of the Cuban Institute of Ophthalmology academic council, Frank E. Martinez.

Participating in the meeting were also Rev. Alexander Vasiutin and Miguel Palacio, Moscow Patriarchate department for external church relations, and Mr. Kh. Takhchidi of the Academician Fyodorov Eye Microsurgery scientific and technical complex.

Welcoming the guests, His Holiness Kirill said, 'I am always pleased to meet our friends from Cuba because many good and personally significant things tie me with this country and there is certainly much that ties together our Church and your country'.

Patriarch Kirill told his guest about the consecration of a Russian Orthodox church dedicated to Our Lady of Kazan in Havana. 'In Cuba there are many Orthodox Russian-speaking people, and it was their spiritual aspirations and requests that helped to build an Orthodox church. I was in Cuba last time in October 2008 when I consecrated that church. Besides, I had a very eventful program of visit. In particular, I was introduced at that time to some scientific institutions in Cuba including an ophthalmological center and was amazed at the high level of their work. I was very much impressed by what was done there, the level of doctors' work and even the equipment, especially considering that for decades the country has been subjected to an economic blockade. I was also pleased to meet our compatriots in the center who worked there. And the idea struck me at that moment to help develop relations between the ophthalmological center in Havana and our famous Fyodorov Eye Microsurgery complex. I am very glad that this project has been realised', His Holiness said.

H. E. Juan Valdes Figueroa, in his turn, expressed condolences to the Russian people over the terrorist attacks on March 29, saying, 'First of all allow me, Your Holiness, on behalf of the Cuban Government and people, to express our condolences over the recent tragic events. The Cuban people felt very keenly the news about the terrorist acts that happened in Moscow, and Cuban President Raul Castro has sent his condolences to the President and the Prime Minister of Russia. The Cubans know from their own experience what terrorist attacks are. We are well aware of the pain of the Russian people'.

Dr. Martinez shared his remembrances about his internship at the Fyodorov Eye Microsurgery center and his stay in Moscow. He recalled having participated in several operations and was amazed at the skills of Russian colleagues and the technological achievements of the center. His Holiness Kirill expressed hope that the development of relations and exchange of experience between the Russian and Cuban scientific communities would continue.

In conclusion of the meeting, the Cuban ambassador presented the Russian Orthodox Church with a commemorative medal issued to mark the 100th anniversary of the Cuban Public Health Ministry and conveyed a letter of thanks for assistance in developing scientific contacts.

Dr. Martinez presented Patriarch Kirill with a photo-album about the history of the Russian parish in Havana, prepared by its rector, Archpriest Vyacheslav Bachin.

As a token of the meeting, His Holiness gave his guests copies of his book ‘A Pastor’s Word’ translated into Spanish.

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