



His Holiness Patriarch Kirill meets with President of Guatemala Álvaro Colom Caballeros

On 22 March 2010, His Holiness Patriarch Kirill of Moscow and All Russia met with the President of Guatemala Álvaro Colom Caballeros at the Patriarchal Chambers of the Cathedral of Christ the Saviour in Moscow, press service of the Patriarch of Moscow and All Russia reports.

They were joined by the deputy chairman of the Moscow Patriarchate Department for external church relations hegumen Philipp (Ryabykh); acting DECR secretary for far abroad countries Rev. Sergiy Zvonarev; staff member of the same secretariat M. Palasio; and staff assistant of the DECR deputy secretary K. Peregudin.

The Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs was represented by the director of the Latin America Department Yu. Korchagin and Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of the Russian Federation to the Republic of Guatemala N. Vladimir.

President Caballeros was accompanied by Minister of Foreign Affairs Roger Haroldo Melgar; Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of Guatemala to the Russian Federation Arturo Romero Duarte Ortis; Minister of Culture and Sports Geronimo Lanserio Chingo; head of the Presidential Secretariat Gustavo Adolfo Cambarra, and other officials.

His Holiness Patriarch Kirill of Moscow and All Russia greeted President Caballeros and called his visit a historical event, as the President of Guatemala visits Russia for the first time. "It is gratifying to see that the Guatemala leadership intends to develop relations with the Russian Orthodox Church. Bearing witness to this is that fact that your official programme begins with a meeting with the Patriarch of Moscow and All Russia," His Holiness remarked.

'Many generations from the republics of the former Soviet Union learned about the life in Guatemala from the works of an renowned author Miguel Angel Asturias. The International Olympic Committee at its session in Guatemala in 2007 named Sochi as the place of the Winter Olympic Games-2014. This decision has brought our countries closer together and has shown our mutual liking.'

His Holiness touched upon the rich and difficult history of Guatemala, the place of a most advanced ancient civilization – the culture of Maya, and mentioned deep Christian roots of the country. "The Church plays an important part in education and public life of Guatemala. Hundreds of its young residents receive secondary education in Catholic colleges," the Primate of the Russian Orthodox

Church said.

His Holiness thinks that social justice, a theme on which the Russian Orthodox Church focuses its attention, is particularly topical under difficult economic conditions in Guatemala, especially for its poor citizens. "We consider social justice as the most important part of Christian ethics. I am confident that at present, as the world faces global economic crisis, the authorities of all countries should concentrate their attention on the solution of social problems and provide a fair distribution of material goods."

His Holiness spoke about relations between the people of Guatemala and the Russian Orthodox Church and remarked that "our believers have always liked Indian nations," the first in the Americas, while the Orthodox Church has accumulated 'rich experience of missionary work with indigenous people on the continent."

His Holiness Patriarch Kirill mentioned certain periods in history during which Russian missionaries preached in North America, translated the Holy Scriptures into local languages, and educated American nations/. Christian preachers have always respected local customs, never resorted to violence, or forced the Indians to faith.

His Holiness also noted that a small group of Russian Orthodox believers is living in Guatemala, and the Moscow Patriarchate does its best to give them spiritual support. "The Holy Trinity convent of the Church of Antioch takes care for the believers of the Moscow Patriarchate who live and work in Guatemala. There is no representation of the Moscow Patriarchate in Guatemala as yet, but our parishes have been opened in some countries of the Central America and the Caribbean, including Panama, Costa Rica, the Dominican Republic, and Cuba."

The opening of the branch of the "Russian World" Foundation in Guatemala, with which the Russian Orthodox Church cooperates, was an important event in the relations between the two countries. His Holiness highly appreciated the library in the Russian language, compiled by the Foundation. The library contains religious books and books of the history of Russian Orthodoxy.

President of Guatemala H. E. Álvaro Colom Caballeros thanked His Holiness for warm reception, saying: "This visit is very important to me personally, as well as to the Parliament and people of Guatemala. I am a Christian, a Catholic, and I am confident that our country needs faith and Christian principles. Relations with the Russian Orthodox Church and with the Vatican are a blessing for Guatemala."

President Caballeros thanked His Holiness for attention and deep respect to the people of Guatemala and to the cultural and spiritual heritage of the country. He is confident that this interest will be

conducive to the rapprochement between people of the two countries.

His Holiness presented the President of Guatemala with the "Sign" Icon of the Mother of God and a set of candlesticks made in the traditional Russian style.

President Caballeros presented His Holiness Patriarch Kirill with an album of Guatemala folk music and a book of the art of Maya and invited His Holiness to visit Guatemala.

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