



His Holiness Patriarch Kirill meets with Mahmoud Abbas, president of the Palestinian National Authority

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On 27 January 2010, His Holiness Patriarch Kirill of Moscow and All Russia met at his working residence in Chisty side street with the President of the Palestinian National Authority (PNA) Mahmoud Abbas. Taking part in the meeting on the part of the Russian Orthodox Church were archpriest Nikolai Balashov, deputy chairman of the Moscow Patriarchate Department for external church relations, hieromonk Stefan (Igumnov) and Vakhtang Kipshidze, the DECR staff members. President Abbas was accompanied by the Ambassador of Palestine to Russia Faed Mustafa, member of the executive committee of the Palestine Liberation Organization Saib Oreikat, counselor of the President of the Palestinian National Authority Azzam al-Ahmed, and official representative of the PNA President, minister Nabil Abu Rudeina. They were joined by the representative of the Russian Federation to the Palestinian National Authority S. Kozlov, counsellor of the Middle East and Northern Africa department of the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs T. Zabiroy, and ambassador at large of the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs A. Vdovin.

His Holiness Patriarch Kirill warmly greeted the President of the Palestinian National Authority. Recalling their meeting a year ago, His Holiness said: "I am very glad to continue our dialogue." He mentioned the centuries-long hearty relations of the Russian people with Palestine; thousands of pilgrims of the Russian Orthodox Church have been visiting the Holy Land. "I would like to thank you and in your person the people of Palestine for hospitality and good attitude to our pilgrims, to the Russian Orthodox Church, and to Russia," His Holiness continued and underscored that Russian people take to heart the tragic events in the Holy Land. "Of course, the road to peace in the Holy Land is hard; it requires wisdom, courage, and patience. However, there are no human problems that cannot be solved, the more so with God's help. That is why I express my hope and deep confidence in that peace and justice will prevail in the blessed Holy Land."

His Holiness recalled that the Russian Orthodox Church has always come forward for peace and justice in the Middle East. "We respect the right of the Palestinian people to their statehood as it complies with the UN resolutions. However, it is very important not only to bring about political justice, but also to have people learn to live in peace with one another on this rather small space, so dear to all of us. The Arab people of Palestine along going along the way of establishing their statehood. We believe that the State of Palestine would be a guarantor of peace in the region," His Holiness said.

He also noted that although the situation is difficult, religious communities had a free access to the holy

sites throughout Palestine. His Holiness Patriarch Kirill of Moscow and All Russia assured President Abbas in the willingness of the Russian Orthodox Church to continue her efforts aimed at the establishment of the lasting and just peace in the Holy Land, and wished him patience.

"I am really happy to meet with you here for the second time and will be glad to have our next meeting in the Holy Land, for instance, in Bethlehem, or in Jerusalem," said the President of the Palestinian National Authority. "We try to attain peace in the Holy Land," Mahmoud Abbas emphasized. "Our objective is the safe, stable and tranquil life of the adherents of the three world religions, since wars bring only misfortunes and destruction. I render honour to your wisdom when hearing your words of the necessity to keep patience in order to achieve the mentioned goal in the long run."

President Abbas declared the willingness of the Palestinian National Authority to continue its efforts to make the access of pilgrims from Russia and other countries of the world to the holy sites in Palestine easier. "We believe it very important for the Orthodox pilgrims to get to know both the Holy Land and people living there," Mahmoud Abbas said and added that the people of the Russian Federation and the Palestinian people, as well as religious communities of Russia and Palestine, have maintained relations of long standing in history.

"The negotiations, undoubtedly, have no alternative. Proceeding from this notion, we try to adhere to wisdom you have mentioned... The negotiations are a difficult process, and one should surmount many obstacles to attain necessary results. Yet, we cherish our hopes and expectations, and remain patient while trying to effect the necessary results," President Abbas said. He greeted the Primate of the Russian Orthodox Church with the anniversary of his enthronement and wished him good health and success in his Primatial ministry, adding: "The development of the Church is a progress of Orthodox nations who have been friendly nations to us."

The sides discussed prospects of peaceful settlement in the Holy Land and the negotiations process and noted destructive consequences caused by any extremist action undermining peaceful efforts. In the end of the meeting the sides exchanged presents.

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