Message of Archbishop Hilarion of Volokolamsk, Chairman of the Moscow Patriarchate Department to the participants in the session of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (Session of 2010, first part on 25-29 January 2010)

Dear delegates:

The PACE current session will consider discrimination on grounds of sexual orientation and gender identity, an issue having a serious ethical aspect. The overwhelming majority of European Christians, Muslims, and Jews have common vision of this problem.

It is obvious that the draft Resolution and draft Recommendation cast doubt on the role of the family as a union between men and women that presupposes care for each other and birth and upbringing of children. Any other forms of sexual relationship that are getting widely practiced in contemporary world cannot claim legal status like the status of social institute. To consider the family in any other way means to call the very existence of society in question.

The Russian Orthodox Church, like many religious communities in Europe, considers homosexualism a sin. This proceeds from our teaching that has not been altered for centuries. In the draft documents submitted to you for approval this position is called the "hate speech" of which religious leaders are accused. The building up of a democratic Europe cannot, we believe, be accompanied by the persecution of believers who strive to live in harmony with their conscience and according to the commandments of God.

The Russian Church does not advocate the persecution of sexual minorities. However, views towards homosexualism that run counter to the convictions of believers should not be imposed on them by mass media and systems of education. Likewise, we do not force anyone to share our position, yet we consider it inadmissible to forbid believers to express their opinion of this matter openly.

We call upon the participants in the PACE session to refrain from taking any decision on discrimination of sexual minorities and to come back to the subject only after it is openly discussed by all interested parties. Thus, in our opinion, the Council of Europe would be able to follow the path of building up Europe without drawing new dividing lines.

/+ Hilarion/

Archbishop of Volokolamsk

Chairman

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