Chairman of the Department for External Church Relations meets with Russian and foreign journalists

[gallery link="file"]

On 12 January 2010, Archbishop Hilarion of Volokolamsk, the DECR chairman, met with the journalists. Taking part in the meeting that took place at the Department for External Church Relations, were some thirty representatives of Russian and foreign mass media, including TV channels "Vesti 24, "Rustavi 2" (Georgia), information agencies ITAR-TASS, "RIA-Novosti," "Interfax," BBC (Great Britain), "Reiter" (Great Britain), Radio ARD (Germany), newspapers 'Figaro" (France), "Financial Times" (Great Britain), "NG-Religions," and others.

The meeting was dedicated to the external activities of the Russian Orthodox Church in 2010. Archbishop Hilarion submitted a working plan of the Moscow Patriarchate Department for external church relations for approval by His Holiness the Patriarch and members of the Holy Synod at its session on 25 December 2009 (Minutes 129).

"I greet the mass media representatives whom I invited to the Department for External Church Relations to tell you about the DECR work. First, I will tell you in brief about the last year and then present you our plans for this year so that you have accurate information about the upcoming events.

"The last year was crucial for the DECR and the Russian Orthodox Church as a whole. The Russian Orthodox Church has now the new Patriarch who before the election to the Patriarchal throne was the DECR head for almost twenty years. The DECR now has the new leadership with the blessing of His Holiness the Patriarch and by the decision of the Holy Synod. We have tried to continue the line of my predecessor dealing with the same themes and at the same time outlining new approach to ensure positive changes."

The DECR chairman noted a substantial improvement of relations with the Patriarchate of Constantinople. "It happened on the personal initiative of His Holiness Patriarch Kirill and was caused by the understanding of the necessity of close cooperation among the Local Orthodox Churches in all spheres of church life, including Church-State relations," Archbishop Hilarion underscored. "His Holiness Patriarch Kirill visited Constantinople. It was the first of the official visits paid by the newly elected Primate of the Church." Archbishop Hilarion reminded the audience that His Holiness Patriarch Kirill would visit the Local Orthodox Churches in accordance with the diptych.

"Our dialogue with the Roman Catholic Church continues and is being somewhat intensified. I visited

Rome and met with Pope Benedict XVI and leaders of the department of the Roman Curia. We are working at the solution of problems still existing in our relations." Archbishop Hilarion noted that the problems that gravely impede a serious improvement of our relations include the interconfessional situation in Western Ukraine.

Last year, the DECR maintained interreligious contacts as well as contacts with our compatriots. The DECR assisted His Holiness the Patriarch in solution of the problems in Ukraine. "I believe we will continue along the same lines in the new year," Archbishop Hilarion said and presented plans for 2010.

"We intend to continue active cooperation with the Patriarchate of Constantinople along the line outlined during the visit of His Holiness Patriarch Kirill to Constantinople last summer. Later next May, His Holiness Patriarch Bartholomew of Constantinople is going to visit the Russian Orthodox Church. He is supposed to visit Moscow, Vladimir, Suzdal, and St. Petersburg. It will be the first after many years official visit of the Patriarch of Constantinople to the Russian Orthodox Church," Archbishop Hilarion said.

He informed media men of his intention to visit Istanbul to take part in the meeting of the European Council of Religious Leaders (ECRL). Planned are Archbishop Hilarion's meeting with His Holiness Patriarch Bartholomew and a concert of church music in "Agia Irini" church museum.

Contacts with the monasteries on the Holy Mount Athos would be continued. "I hope to pay another visit to Athos in 2010. As a matter of fact, I am planning to visit Athos every year, if opportunity presents itself," Archbishop Hilarion said.

The Primate of our Church plans to visit the Orthodox Church of Alexandria in the first half of the year, and the Orthodox Church of Antioch in the second half.

Our dialogue with the Georgian Patriarchate will continue. His Holiness Patriarch Kirill will visit Georgia in time according to the diptych, but regular exchange of official church delegations will take place in 2010," Archbishop Hilarion underscored. "For instance, I am planning to visit Tbilisi later in January for talks with the Georgian Orthodox Church about certain problems and to take part in divine services with His Holiness and Beatitude Catholics-Patriarch Iliya II during commemoration of St. Nino, Equal-to-the-Apostles, the Enlightener of Georgia," he added.

Archbishop Hilarion also said that the Episcopal Council of the Church of Serbia would take place on January 22 to elect a new patriarch. The enthronement will be held on January 24. "A delegation of the Russian Orthodox Church will take part in the enthronement of the Patriarch of Serbia. It is quite possible that His Holiness Patriarch Kirill will be at the head of the delegation."

The DECR will continue its work in China. During Archbishop Hilarion's visit to China at the invitation of the State Directorate for Religious Affairs, protocols on cooperation and on the training of Chinese students at the theological educational institutions of the Russian Orthodox Church were drawn up. "If these protocols are signed, it will be possible to talk of real positive changes in our work along the Chinese line," Archbishop Hilarion noted, "Our task in China is modest: we are not going to be engaged in mission and, still less, in proselytism. We only want the Orthodox Christians in China, be they the Russian-speaking people, or the Orthodox Chinese speaking the Chinese language, to have an opportunity to go to church and enjoy spiritual care of the priests."

Archbishop Hilarion added that His Holiness the Patriarch was going to visit Ukraine next summer, and the DECR will assist with preparations.

"I would like to note a positive dynamics in the relations with the Old Believers. Last year I met with Metropolitan Kornily, once officially, and several times unofficially at the events in which both if us participated. We shall continue our dialogue, but shall not speed it up, as the subject is very delicate. We shall continue

the dialogue in order to improve relations between the Russian Orthodox Church and different Old Believers branches and to attain better mutual understanding on the problems dividing us at present.'

The DECR will pay attention to the work with the state bodies and civil society institutions in the far abroad countries. "For instance, we shall continue our work with the European Union structures through the representations of our Church in Brussels and Strasbourg; we shall take part in the Russian-German "St. Petersburg Dialogue" forum, and in the Russian-Greek and Russian-Italian forums of civil society due to be held next summer and autumn," the DECR chairman said. We plan to develop our relations with non-governmental international organizations, including the UN, OSCE, and UNESCO. Representatives of our Department will take part in the seminar on "International Law and Religious Traditions' due to take place in Strasbourg next spring. Several interreligious meeting will be held in 2010, including the ECRL in Istanbul in March; the 3rd Forum of the "Alliance of Civilizations" in Rio-de-Janeiro on May 28-29; and the World Summit of Religious Leaders in June before the G8 meeting.

The Department for External Church Relations will continue its work with the compatriots living in the far abroad. "For instance, we shall take part in the Days of Russia in France from January 2010 till January 2011. Also planned are the Days of Russian spiritual culture in Serbia, Macedonia, Croatia, Bosnia, and Herzegovina," Archbishop Hilarion said.

The interchristian relations will be developed. Representatives of the Russian Orthodox Church will

participate in the work of the World Council of Churches, including sessions of its Executive Committee due to take place in Geneva on February 23-26 and in Edinburgh on September 10-14.

"We do not participate in the work of the Conference of European Churches at present. We have suspended our participation in the work of this organization after the Estonian church structure of the Patriarchate of Constantinople had been accepted into membership, while the Estonian Orthodox Church of the Moscow Patriarchate had not. Metropolitan Emmanuel of France, an Orthodox hierarch, has become CEC President recently. We expect him to deal with this problem, and in case it is solved, we shall consider our return to the Conference of European Churches on a regular basis," Archbishop Hilarion said.

He called media men's attention to another interchristian organization, namely the Christian Interconfessional Consultative Committee of the CIS and Baltic countries (CICC). "This organization is over ten years old. It suspended its work for a while, but resumed it in 2008, and we plan to invigorate and expand it," Archbishop Hilarion continued. "A plenary CICC session is due to take place in Moscow on February 4 on the theme "A Christian Family – a small church and foundation of healthy society." It is very important for representatives of different Christian Churches to discuss not only theological problems, but also the problems that directly concern people's life, and to defend traditional Christian values together. Family is a fundamental value; therefore we shall devote special and intent attention to this theme in the CICC."

We intend to develop relations with the Roman Catholic Church; a number of events is planned for 2010. For instance, the DECR Chairman will visit Italy in mid-May. "I plan to visit Milan, Turin, Bologna, and Rome, and meet with high representatives of the Roman Catholic Church," Archbishop Hilarion informed the audience.

A regular plenary session of the Joint International Commission for the Theological Dialogue between the Roman Catholic Church and the Orthodox Church will take place in Vienna on September 20-27 to continue discussion of the theme 'The Role of the Bishop of Rome in the ecclesial communion in the 1st Millennium." "This theme was discussed at the meeting in Cyprus last autumn; we have elaborated a half of the document that should become a result of the discussion. I hope that we shall manage to refine the document though there are certain shortcomings in it," Archbishop Hilarion stated and added that participation of the Moscow Patriarchate delegation in the work of the Joint Commission would be supplements by setting up a small working group at the Department for External Church Relations. The group will consist of theologians of the Russian Church who will thoroughly consider the text in order to make fundamental amendments to it.

Our relations with the Non-Chalcedonian Churches will also be continued. For instance, His Holiness

Patriarch Kirill will meet with the Supreme Catholics of All Armenians Karekin II who is going to visit Moscow on January 21-22.

"As far as possible, we shall continue bilateral contacts with the Protestant community, though it is difficult to talk of any positive changes in this sphere, as liberal tendencies prevailing in the Protestant communities in the West and the North make our dialogue with them difficult and sometimes even impossible," Archbishop Hilarion stated and noted that the dialogue with the Evangelical Church in Germany, the fiftieth anniversary of which had been meant to be celebrated last November and December, should find new forms, as it is impossible to maintain it as an inter-Church dialogue as earlier "because a woman, who is a bishop, was elected President of the Council of the Evangelical Church in Germany, and our official participation in the dialogue with this Church on any level would be perceived as an implicit recognition of the female priesthood and female episcopate," Archbishop Hilarion said. "We have never recognized the female priesthood, still less the female episcopate, but we continued the dialogue by ecclesial economy and for attaining better understanding. Yet today, this dialogue becomes very difficult even for protocol reasons. We have neither broken off this dialogue, as certain mass media reported, nor frozen it. We shall search for the new forms of interaction."

After his presentation, the Chairman of the Moscow Patriarchate Department answered questions of the participants in the meeting.

Source: https://mospat.ru/en/news/57904/