



Patriarch Kirill's letter to Council of Europe Secretary General Thorbjørn Jagland

His Holiness Patriarch Kirill of Moscow and All Russia sent the following letter to the Council of Europe Secretary General Thorbjørn Jagland:

Dear Mr. Jagland,

Kindly accept my cordial congratulations on your election to the important post of Secretary General of the Council of Europe. Your long-standing experience of state governance and diplomatic work is a guarantee of successful leadership over one of the oldest all-European organizations.

This year the Council of Europe is marking its 60th anniversary. Both in member countries and the Council itself this event has become an occasion for serious reflections on the contents of its work in the present and prospects in the future.

We are convinced of the need to do all that is possible to protect human dignity, freedom and rights in today's world. This conviction grows from the essence of Christian faith, the entire history of the Church and especially from the tragic experience of the last century as it witnessed the appearance of thousands of new martyrs and confessors who became victims to the atheistic persecution.

In recent years, the Russian Orthodox Church has exerted every effort to grasp the secular concept of human rights and to see it in the light of the Christian teaching of the human beings and their God-given dignity. As a result of these efforts, the Bishops' Council of the Russian Orthodox Church adopted in 2008 a document on Basic Teaching on Human Dignity, Freedom and Rights. We hope that the Council of Europe will treat this document with all possible seriousness as it is addressed to all those who are not indifferent to human rights and dignity.

It is a matter of concern that morality is emasculated in the theory of human rights, while interdependence of moral principles and human rights is not put into question by the authors of the concept, which is reflected in universal and European documents.

It is our conviction that neglect of moral aspects in implementing human rights threatens to undermine the very concept of rights and freedoms which has become one of the achievements of modern history. It is important that this should be taken into account in discussing prospects for developing the practice of the European Court, one of the basic institutions of the Council of Europe, which has adopted a great deal of decisions aimed to protect the dignity of particular persons.

At the same time, in our view the Court in its work has sometimes used unilaterally particular interpretations of individual rights at the expense of collective rights of traditional religious organizations rooted in the history and culture of European nations. This fact points to the need for a serious discussion on problems where the secular law enters the field of canon law and age-honoured moral and spiritual traditions of European nations.

We are gratified to make special mention of the cooperation between the Council of Europe and European religious communities, which has been maintained in recent years for promoting and developing inter-cultural dialogue. While appreciating the initial experience of this cooperation, we expect its agenda to be broadened and deepened.

The visit made to Strasbourg by our late predecessor, His Holiness Patriarch Alexy II, and his meetings with the Council's leaders and his address to the Parliamentary Assembly have become a visible landmark in direct relations between the Council of Europe and the Russian Orthodox Church. This event noted by all the European community became a testimony to the good will and openness to dialogue and cooperation on the part of both the Council of Europe and the largest Orthodox Church in Europe.

We hope that the Council of Europe will intensify its efforts to realize the repeated proposal for setting up instruments for continued systemic cooperation between the Council of European and religious communities representing major European religious traditions.

On our part, for this very purpose the Holy Synod of our Church established in 2004 a special Representation of the Russian Orthodox Church in Strasbourg. At present it is directed by Hegumen Philaret Bulekov who is authorized to present the position of the Moscow Patriarchate to the Council of Europe. I hope that our Representative will have an opportunity to maintain close and kindly cooperation with you.

From my heart I wish you moral and physical strength in your new lofty service for the benefit of European nations.

Respectfully,

+ Kirill,

Patriarch of Moscow and All Russia

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