**THE RUSSIAN ORTHODOX CHURCH**
Department for External Church Relations

# Patriarch Kirill supports Italian Government over European Court's decision to ban Christian symbols in schools

*The European Court of Human Rights ruled on the case of Lautsi versus Italy that the presence of crucifixes in Italian schools violated human rights. His Holiness Patriarch Kirill of Moscow and All Russia has sent a letter to Italian Prime Minister Sylvio Berlusconi, stating resolute support for the intention of the Italian Government to appeal this decision of the European Court of Human Rights. Below is the text of the letter.*

His Excellency Sylvio Berlusconi

Prime Minister

Republic of Italy

**Your Excellency,**

The decision made by the European Court on 3 November 2009 on the case of Lautsi versus Italy to the effect that the presence of crucifixes violates human rights in Italian public schools has disturbed the Russian Orthodox Church.

The Christian heritage in Italy and other countries in Europe should not become a matter to be considered by European human rights institutions. Christian religious symbols present in the public space in Europe are part of the common European identity without which neither the past nor the present or the future of this continent are thinkable. The pretext of ensuring the secular nature of a state should not be used to assert an anti-religious ideology, which apparently violates peace in the community, discriminating against the religious majority in Europe which is Christian.

We state our full and unconditional support for the intention of the Italian Government to appeal this decision in the European Court's Grand Chamber. European democracy should not encourage Christanophobia like atheistic regimes did in the past.

The Russian Orthodox Church in cooperation with the Roman Catholic Church intends to notify the world and European public of its flat rejection of such decisions and to encourage a discussion on the practice of the European Court of Human Rights on various platforms.

Respectfully,

**+ Kirill**

**Patriarch of Moscow and All Russia**

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