



## **Patriarch Kirill meets with Byelorussian President Alexander Lukashenko**

During his primatial visit to Belarus, His Holiness Patriarch Kirill of Moscow and All Russia met on 25 September 2009 with Byelorussian President Alexander Lukashenko.

The head of Belarus welcomed His Holiness Kirill at the front door of this residence. They moved to the Blue Hall for an exchange of greetings and a short meeting. Welcoming His Holiness, President Lukashenko said in particular, 'You must regard Belarus as your native soil, a part of the vast canonical territory of the Russian Orthodox Church. Over 85 percent of the people in Belarus are Orthodox. They are good and faithful believers'. The president also said that the meeting was a pleasant opportunity for discussing church-state relations in Belarus.

'We seek to build our state on the basis of Christian values. There are 25 confessions in the country and there are neither contradictions nor conflicts among them. We are aware of your own contribution to the consolidation of inter-confessional peace and harmony and support it', he stressed.

The Primate of the Russian Orthodox Church thanked President Lukashenko for the invitation to come to Belarus, noting that 'the Patriarch of All Russia is not the Patriarch of the Russian Federation or any other country' since Holy Rus' and her historical heritage are present in various modern states.

'Our nations are not united by nostalgia for the past but rather a system of traditional values. Even when the word 'God' was prohibited, Christian values were not forgotten or driven away from people's life. How else is it possible to explain the incredible sacrificial heroism the Byelorussian people showed during the Great Patriotic War'? His Holiness said, adding that 'much was done during the war years not by order but by the dictate of the human heart', and it was Orthodox Christian values that underlay the self-sacrifice manifested by people.

'To preserve the values essential for us is to preserve the face of the modern state that refuses to abandon its roots', His Holiness Kirill said. 'May God grant that Belarus in her development may preserve her traditional values, while remaining a modern open country'.

The exchange of greeting was followed by a talk between the patriarch and the Byelorussian leader. After a closed part of the talk, the discussion continued in an extended group including Metropolitan Filaret of Minsk and Slutsk, Patriarchal Exarch for All Belarus, as well as those who accompanied His Holiness on his trip including Archbishop Hilarion of Volokolamsk, Bishop Sergiy of Solnechnogorsk,

director of the Moscow Patriarchate administrative secretariat, Archpriest Vsevolod Chaplin, chairman of the Synodal department for church-society relations, and V. Legoida, chairman of the Synodal information department.

In the exchange of speeches, Mr. Lukashenko said that 'people in Belarus have a special appreciation of the efforts to prevent division in the unity of the Russian Orthodox Church, to extend and strengthen its influence in the modern world, to revive missionary traditions, to work with various sectors of the society, first of all the youth, and to develop interconfessional dialogue'.

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