DECR chairman holds memorial service for repose of Pontic Greeks



On May 19, 2021, with a blessing of His Holiness Kirill, Patriarch of Moscow and All Russia, Metropolitan Hilarion of Volokolamsk, head of the Moscow Patriarchate's department for external church relations, held the lity for the victims of the Pontic Greeks genocide, at the Church of All Saints-in-Kulishki, Moscow.

Concelebrating with His Eminence were Archpriest Nikolay Balashov, DECR vice-chairman; Archpriest Igor Yakimchuk DECR secretary for inter-Orthodox relations; Archpriest Sergiy Zvonarev, acting rector of the Church of All Saints-in-Kulishki and DECR secretary for the far-abroad diaspora; and Hieromonk Gregory (Sokolov) of the DECR secretariat for inter-Orthodox relations.

Present at the memorial service were Ms. E. Nassika, Greece's Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary in Moscow; Mr Zinonas, Cyprus's Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary in Moscow, Mr N. Krikos, Greek embassy general consul in Moscow. and Ms Krikos; Mr Yalamas, head of

the Greek embassy department for culture; as well as Mr. S. Gavrilov, head of the State Duma committee for development of the civil society, public and religious associations; Mr. K. Bersenev, deputy director of the MFA Fourth European Department; Ms. E. Kolesnikova, head of the Greek and Cyprus office of the MFA Forth European Department Mr. I. Nikolaev, counsellor of the Republic of Crimea vice-chairman; Ms I. Sheff, executive director of the Moscow Society of Greeks; Mr. T. Yannitsi, director of the Hellenic Cultural Center in Moscow; and Ms. S. Khristianova, chair of the Cultural Education Society of Greek Women 'Agapi'.

After the service, Metropolitan Hilarion addressed the congregation:

"Χριστὸς ἀνέστη! Christ is risen! Χριστὸς ἀνέστη!

Your Excellences, Venerable Fathers, Dear Brothers and Sisters!

I greet you all at the Church of All Saints-in-Kulishki, which has been the long-standing spiritual home for the Orthodox Greek community in the city of Moscow.

Today, we have assembled here to lift up prayers for the victims of the mass extermination of the peaceful population in Pontus and Asia Minor, which has become a bleeding wound in the hearts of those who class themselves as a part of the Greek people and culture.

In the situation of the First World War, the Christian people who lived in the territory of the Ottoman Empire were subjected to terrifying ordeals, above all, the Greek population of Pontus. The violence unleashed against them was striking in its scale and cruelty. It was a real genocide. Hundreds of thousands of totally innocent old people and children, men and women - native people of the region were killed. A whole people was doomed to suffering. Pontic Greeks died of hunger and hardships due to forceful deportations. The road of grief leading to obscurity was sown with bodies of those who were banished. A few survivors carried away their bitter memory to the diaspora. And a few years later, as a result of the Greek-Turkish war, almost all the Greek population of Asia Minor was either exterminated or driven way to foreign lands. The consciousness of many generations has kept stories about the horrors of that time.

The faith in God helps to uphold the bitter pages of the past, to come out of trials to be even stronger in spirit and in struggle. We have to cultivate in ourselves, in our families and children the faith to be handed down as a precious treasure to younger generations.

The Russian Orthodox Church together with the Greek people cherishes the prayerful memory of the victims of Pontus and Asia Minor. The memory of the peaceful residents who were killed and that of the

all who were banished fr om their native lands will always resound like a bell in our hearts not letting us forget the tragic pages of the past.

We express our solidarity with the Greek people and cherish the faith that the Lord will wipe every tear and turn grief into joy, for Christ is risen and will rise us from the dead together with Him.

Χριστὸς ἀνέστη!»

In her response, Ambassador Ms Ekaterini Nassika thanked Metropolitan Hilarion, saying, “During many years the Ottoman empire, the Young Turks and Kemal would kill, torture and banish hundreds of thousands of Pontians - women, children and men, from their native lands. Thus Hellenism disappeared in the territories which, in their times, used to promote culture, strengthen the faith and study the language for millennia since ancient Greece, Byzantium, the modern times and to the 20th century”. At the same time, she noted, it was as late as 1994 that the Greek parliament decided to reveal its attitude to those events and to establish the commemoration day. Since that time, the political leaders of the country honour the memory of all the victims of the genocide.

According to Ms Nassika, the descenders of Pontic Greeks, who managed to survive the persecutions through the incredible efforts of whole generations, live in Greece making their enormous contribution to the development of the society.

“Among the successful ones are also those who have settled in Canada, USA and Australia, but especially in Russia wh ere their presence continues to remain very tangible in all spheres of the life of their second homeland, in particular, in culture, economy and science. They have managed to build a lasting bridge between the Russian and the Greek peoples, thus strengthening the Greek-Russian friendship”, said the head of the Greek diplomatic mission in Moscow.

DECR Communication Service

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