His Beatitude Patriarch John X of Antioch and Metropolitan Anthony of Volokolamsk visit Representation of the Russian Church in Damascus



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On January 21, His Beatitude Patriarch John X of Antioch and All the East and Metropolitan Anthony of Volokolamsk, chairman of the Moscow Patriarchate's Department for External Church Relations (DECR), visited the Representation of the Russian Orthodox Church in Damascus. At the church of St. Ignatius the God-Bearer a prayer service was celebrated to the hieromartyr with attendance of the Antiochian bishops Moussa of Daraya, John of Sergiopolis, Arsenios of Philadelphia, Moses of Larissa and Roman of Seleucia; delegation of the Russian Orthodox Church consisting of Archpriest Nikolay Balashov, adviser to His Holiness Patriarch of Moscow and All Rus'; Archpriest Igor Yakimchuk, DECR vice-chairman; Archimandrite Philip (Vasiltsev), representative of the Patriarch of Moscow and All Rus'

to the Patriarch of Antioch and All the East; Rev. Alexander Yershov, assistant to the DECR chairman, as well as H.E. Alexander Yefimov, Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of the Russian Federation to the Syrian Arab Republic, and Mr. Yegor I. Skopenko, executive director of the Foundation for the Support of Christian Culture and Heritage.

While greeting the high guests, Archimandrite Philip expressed confidence that the first visit of Metropolitan Anthony as the new DECR chairman to the Antiochian Church would undoubtedly strengthen a loving relationship between the two fraternal Orthodox Churches and asked His Beatitude Patriarch John X to pray for his Holiness Patriarch, Metropolitan Anthony of Volokolamsk, the parishioners of this church, and the entire Russian Orthodox Church.

Metropolitan Anthony underscored in his address the significance of the church at the Damascus Representation of the Russian Orthodox Church, calling it a place for worship and spiritual consolation for the Russian-speaking compatriots residing in Damascus who can pray here in their mother tongue and also a place that helps to keep a special spiritual bridge between the two Churches. The DECR chairman warmly thanked His Beatitude Patriarch John X for his attention and care for the Representation, his invariable support of the Russian Orthodox Church and firm witness to the truth and commitment to the holy canons by which the Orthodox Church has been living over millennia.

His Beatitude Patriarch John X expressed his joy over the presence of the Russian Orthodox Church delegation at the St. Ignatius church and asked to convey his profound respect and love to His Holiness Patriarch Kirill of Moscow and All Rus'. His Beatitude added that the Representations of the Moscow Patriarchate in Damascus and Beirut as well as the Representation of the Antiochian Patriarchate in Moscow are testimony to our friendship. Patriarch John X expressed gratitude to Metropolitan Anthony, the Russian Ambassador, and other representatives of the Russian state and in their person to all Russian people for help and support being rendered to the Antiochian Orthodox Church in these hard times. “I would like to tell you that we and the peoples of Syria and Lebanon always keep you in our hearts,” the Primate of the Antiochian Orthodox Church said in conclusion.

After the prayer service, Patriarch John X, the DECR chairman and their suites got acquainted with the work of the Centre for Pediatric Prosthetics and Rehabilitation operating at the Representation. Attending the meeting with the management, personnel, parents and young patients were also the Governor of Damascus Muhammad Tariq Krishati and Russian Ambassador Alexander Yefimov.

The parents of children treated at the Centre spoke about a perceptible improvement in their children's health. “We cannot find words to describe the vital role you have played in their life. We have never seen such a healthcare facility, and this Centre has changed our life in Syria. Thank you very much! We wish all the best to you and to your country,” these were the words of mothers whose children suffered the

loss of limbs during the hostilities. The mothers wish such centres to be opened in other regions of Syria.

The head of the Centre, Dr. Hassan Nasrallah, thanked all those who have taken part in the establishment of this medical facility and have given support to it. He underscored that thanks to medical treatment the traces of blood were being wiped from the faces of Syrian children who suffered during the war. Over three hundred children have been treated since the opening of the Centre less than a year ago, including sixty children who underwent replacement surgery. “We are trying to expand our range of activities to have various levels of healthcare,” he said. One of them is the art therapy that is beneficial for mental health of the dreadfully injured children.

His Beatitude Patriarch John X of Antioch and All the East welcomed the Russian Orthodox Church delegation headed by Metropolitan Antony of Volokolamsk and all participants in the meeting including children who are undergoing medical treatment at the Centre. He said: “It is very important that the peoples of the Russian Federation who wished to help the fraternal people of Syria have taken a direct part in this grand action of establishing the Centre for the improvement of your health and for your joy, our dear children. On your behalf, on our own behalf and on behalf of our Church I express profound gratitude to Metropolitan Anthony. We are happy to have you with us today as well as all those who work at the Centre – its director and his team. I wish you God’s aid!”

Metropolitan Antony of Volokolamsk said in his address: “It is a great joy for me and for all members of the delegation from Russia to be here in Syria and meet all of you. The Russian state, the Russian Orthodox Church and Russian people have made it possible to open this Centre and make it operational. One of the reasons is that we sincerely believe and know that the peoples of Russia and Syria are friends and brothers. It should be always like this with friends and brothers: if one brother rejoices, the other rejoices together with him, but if one brother undergoes hardship, the other brother, his friend, must help him. This Centre is just one of the many signs of our friendship and our brotherly relations. It was good to know that over three hundred children have been treated here.”

The archpastor called the opening of the Centre at the Representation of the Russian Orthodox Church in Damascus symbolic. “Many medical doctors know that the healing largely depends on them, but a lot depends on God’s aid. That is why miracles are performed within these walls by doctors’ hands and prayers are said for your soonest recovery, dear children,” said Metropolitan Antony.

Mr. Yegor I. Skopenko, executive director of the Foundation for the Support of Christian Culture and Heritage, said that the meeting with parents of the young patients has shown that the Centre enjoys great demand. He added that the Foundation is planning to expand the services of the Centre which is giving an invaluable help to the Syrian children with severe injuries in bringing them back to normal life.

He thanked all the personnel for their labours and wished success in rehabilitation to children and their parents.

A concert performed by children treated at the Centre followed. All children received gifts.

The guests were given a tour around the Centre. Afterwards, Dr. Hassan Nasrallah and Metropolitan Anthony in the presence of Patriarch John X and Governor Krishati signed an addendum to the contract made by the Centre and the Russian Orthodox Church for temporary gratuitous use of medical equipment.

His Beatitude Patriarch John X and Metropolitan Antony of Volokolamsk answered questions of Syrian journalists.

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Children who suffered during military conflict in Syria began to receive medical care in 2018 under the guardianship of the DECR and with the blessing of the Primates of the Russian and Antiochian Orthodox Churches. The programme included prosthetics and rehabilitation of children who have lost their limbs in mine and bomb explosions. In 2019, ten children were taken from Syria to Russia for surgery and underwent rehabilitation. The Centre for Pediatric Prosthetics and Rehabilitation at the Representation of the Russian Orthodox Church in Damascus was solemnly opened in March 2022 during the visit to Syria of Metropolitan Hilarion of Volokolamsk, the then DECR chairman.

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