



## **His Beatitude Patriarch John X of Antioch and Metropolitan Anthony of Volokolamsk attended reception at Russian Embassy in Syria**



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On January 21, Metropolitan Anthony of Volokolamsk, Chairman of the Moscow Patriarchate Department for External Church Relations, who is in Syria with a blessing of His Holiness Patriarch Kirill of Moscow and All Russia, was invited to the Russian embassy in Damascus in honour of the arrival of a delegation of the Russian Orthodox Church to the Syrian capital. Among the invited guests was His Beatitude John X, Patriarch of Great Antioch and All the East.

Present at the reception were Colonel-General A. N. Serdyukov, commander of the Russian Armed Forces Group in the Syrian Arab Republic, Bishop Roman of Seleucia; Archpriest Nikolay Balashov,

adviser to His Holiness Patriarch of Moscow and All Russia; Archpriest Igor Yakimchuk, DECR vice-chairman; Archimandrite Philipp (Vasiltsev), representative of the Patriarch of Moscow and All Russia to the Patriarch of Antioch and All the East; Rev. Alexander Yershov, assistant to the DECR chairman; and Ye. I. Skopenko, executive director of the Foundation for Support of Christian Culture and Heritage.

The guests were welcomed by Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary Ambassador of the Russian Federation to the Syrian Arab Republic A. V. Yefimov. He stressed that it was the first visit of the Primate of the Orthodox Church of Antioch to the Russian Federation embassy in Damascus, just as the first visit to the embassy of Metropolitan Anthony of Volokolamsk. According to Mr. Yefimov, it was a high honour for all the staff members of the Russian diplomatic representation.

‘The embassy is a Russian land in Syria. However, nobody of those present here should feel as a guest because we all brothers and we all are one family’, he said.

In his speech, His Beatitude Patriarch John X expressed joy over his stay on the Russian land in Syria. He shared his warm remembrances of his visits to Russia and meetings with Russian President Vladimir Putin and His Holiness Patriarch Kirill of Moscow and All Russia.

His Beatitude stressed the profound historical nature of relations between the peoples of Syria and Russia, between the Orthodox Churches of Russia and Antioch. He recalled that the first Russian metropolitan was a native of Syria, St. Michael.

Metropolitan Anthony thanked the Russian ambassador for the hospitality. He pointed to the importance of the service that Russian diplomats and military men carry out in Syria, sometimes with risk for their lives and for the sake of establishing peace in the Syrian land and preserving Christian presence in it.

In conclusion, Metropolitan Anthony read out the decree of His Holiness Patriarch Kirill whereby the Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary Ambassador of the Russian Federation to the Syrian Arab Republic A. V. Yefimov is awarded the Order of the Holy Prince Alexander Nevsky, Degree III, for his contribution to the development of church-state relations and on the occasion of his 65<sup>th</sup> birthday.

The DECR chairman presented the Russian diplomat with the high ecclesial award.

In this turn, A. V. Yefimov asked to convey to His Holiness Patriarch Kirill his deep gratitude for the high evaluation of his work in the diplomatic field.