THE RUSSIAN ORTHODOX CHURCH
Department for External Church Relations

Address by Patriarch KIRILL of Moscow and All Russia at the meeting of Russia-Islam Strategic Vision Group



On the 19th of May, 2023, His Holiness Patriarch Kirill of Moscow and All Rus', who is making a Patriarchal visit to Tatarstan, took part in a meeting of Russia-Islam Strategic Vision Group held at the Kazan City Hall and addressed the audience.

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Kazan, 18th May 2023

Dear Rustam Nurgaliyevich,

Dear Muslim religious leaders,

dear participants in the forum,

I greet you with all my heart, happy to be here with you today, on the blessed Kazan land, and take part in this important meeting.

Russia has long-standing relations with the Muslim world. Since the Russia-Islam Strategic Vision Group was set up, the Russian Orthodox Church has been actively engaging in its work.

Our meeting takes place in Kazan. The capital of Tatarstan, perhaps like no other place in Russia, is a visual symbol of fruitful cooperation between people of different faiths for the good of their country and nation. In this city, mosques stand next to churches; Muslim and Orthodox theology is flourishing. Here Christians and Muslims work together for the benefit of the entire society.

I would like to thank esteemed Rustam Nurgaliyevich Minnikhanov, head of the Republic of Tatarstan, for organising this important event. Traditionally, the head of the Kazan Metropolia acts as representative of the Russian Church in the Russia-Islam Strategic Vision Group. Metropolitan Feofan of blessed memory did much in that capacity, and now his successor, Metropolitan Kirill of Kazan and Tatarstan, who is present here, is one of the Group members.

As we look at what is going on in the world, we cannot but see that Western interference in the affairs of other countries, in particular, the Middle East has had sorrowful consequences. Less than a month ago it was the 10th anniversary of the abduction of two metropolitans of Aleppo in Syria. Metropolitans Paul of the Orthodox Church of Antioch and Mar Gregorios Yohanna were kidnapped by terrorists and we still do not know what happened to those remarkable religious leaders. The so-called “Arab Spring” only brought sorrow and countless tribulations to people of those countries, the majority of them Muslims. The Western forces were trying to use a religious factor to destroy those countries’ statehood, to sow enmity and provoke divisions on religious grounds in society. It resulted in an outburst of brutality and violence, and a surge in terror attacks committed under religious slogans. Our own history and the history of other countries clearly show that such approach is inadmissible. We – Christians and Muslims – have to stand against extremism, and in this regard the work of the Russia-Islam Strategic Vision Group is of particular value and significance.

For decades, the Moscow Patriarchate has been maintaining brotherly relations with Islamic leaders and organisations. In recent years, these contacts have intensified considerably. It is gratifying to note that every such meeting is held in the atmosphere of mutual understanding. The Department for External Church Relations of the Moscow Patriarchate has been taking part in this work for many years. In November 2018, the Expert Council under the Patriarch of Moscow and All Russia for Cooperation with the Islamic World was established. Not long ago, we met with the Secretary General of the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation and the head of the Muslim World League. This February, Russian and Iranian theologians held their 12th meeting in Moscow, continuing the dialogue that began more than 25 years ago.

Almost 25 years ago the Interreligious Council of Russia was established. My brothers, leaders of the Islamic and Judaic communities in Russia, and I founded it in December 1998. The Council helps the leaders of traditional religions – Orthodoxy, Islam, Judaism and Buddhism – to coordinate their work, exchange views on various topical issues and appeal to authorities and society on behalf of our faithful. The Patriarch is the Honorary Chairman of this organisation. Metropolitan Anthony of Volokolamsk represents Orthodox Christians in the Council's Presidium. Muslims are represented by the heads of the major Muslims' Spiritual Boards, including the Mufti of Tatarstan and the head of the Muslim Coordinating Centre for the North Caucasus.

Why does the Russian Orthodox Church maintain such close relations with the Muslim Ummah in and outside Russia? Because our fundamental values are alike. Orthodox Christians and Muslims strive to act according to God's will. It is an essential principle of our life. We are conservative in a good way, for Orthodox Christians and Muslims resolutely reject any attempts to make sin a social norm. For us the unnatural confusion of the sexes and the so-called LGBT ideology are absolutely unacceptable. We seek to preserve traditional, God-commanded form of family. Whatever is used to justify the egoistic attitude to people and to the world, it is evident that it substitutes serving God for serving one's passions, which turns a person into a prisoner of his or her own vices.

Faithful to our spiritual ideals, we can work together in opposing the sophisticated propaganda of individualism and the worship of the human being. Orthodox Christians and Muslims are called to uphold their moral values, live up to the ideals of good, love, mercy, justice and mutual respect. We, Christians and Muslims, know and confess that God is the true Creator of the world and the Only Lawmaker. Where God is forgotten, there evil reigns.

A great Russian writer whose influence on our self-awareness was enormous – Fyodor Dostoevsky – expressed this simple but profound idea: If there is now God, then everything is permitted. "If there is no God, then I am god," says one of the characters, Alexei Kirillov, in his novel *Demons*. The origin of such thought pattern goes back to the Renaissance period in the European history. However, misinterpreted,

freedom made humans slaves of their own passions. And what today is coming to various countries under the guise of freedom is destruction and chaos.

I have stated this many times and will say it again – the 21st century's main challenge comes from the godless secular world and is posed to the traditional system of values rooted in religion. To oppose it, we need to ensure consolidation of those forces in society that are committed to their traditions. If we do not wish to see the victory of evil and the development of a universal cult of sin and egoism, then we should give to this challenge a spiritual rebuff, for our joint efforts can save the world from self-destruction. In this respect Christians and Muslims have sufficient potential – religious, cultural, human, intellectual and economic.

To conclude my speech, I would like to express hope that Russia and the Islamic world will develop and broaden their cooperation. The Russian Orthodox Church, which represents the interests of millions of its faithful, is ready to promote it in all possible ways and to exchange experience and knowledge. I believe that today, amid the crisis in international relations, a new possibility is unfolding for us to influence the global agenda so that preservation of the intransient moral values could become one of its primary concerns.

I wish you all successful work.

Thank you for your attention.

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