Address by His Holiness Patriarch Kirill at jubilee meeting of Inter-Religious Council of Russia



The meeting took place at the Danilovsky Hotel Complex on December 7, 2023.

Dear brothers – heads and representatives of Russia's traditional religious communities – and dear guests,

Twenty-five years have passed since the major religious organisations in our country decided to establish the Inter-Religious Council of Russia to facilitate dialogue and represent believers' interests in relations with the state and society. I should say that over these twenty-five years our relations have remained unclouded. Feeling no pressure, in a calm atmosphere, with one mind and one mouth, we were able to address problems facing our country, society, and religious organisations alike, and come up with concerted decisions.

It was not an untroubled period, for various forces tried to sow discord in the Russian society and instigate a split on religious and ethnic grounds, resorting to quasi-religious radicalism and quasi-religious motivation in pursuit of their goal. However, it was largely thanks to mutual understanding between religious leaders that our society managed to avoid polarisation and put an end to the efforts of the emerging radical movements which aspired to capture hearts and minds of at least a large percentage of believers in our country.

It can take long to enumerate all past initiatives and statements of the Inter-Religious Council of Russia but rather than speaking about their quantity I would like to dwell on their outcome, manifest with particular clarity these days. In this regard, we have sufficient grounds for satisfaction.

For example, the National Unity Day set up on the initiative of the Inter-Religious Council of Russia has become a national holiday the majority of our fellow citizens recognise and approve of. It marks a substantial contribution to the life of our society inasmuch as such feast days encourage people to ponder, among other things, over the life of their country. A feast day always gives cause for consolidation and unity based on common ideals. Terrorism in its different manifestations, which our society had to confront, tried to divide people but to no avail because our fellow citizens became even more united in combatting that evil.

By expressing our concerted support for the idea that the word “God” be enshrined in the Constitution of our homeland we, Russian religious leaders, opened doors for traditional values to be established as part of the national policy. Availing myself of this opportunity, I wholeheartedly thank you, dear brothers, for our unity manifested over the past years as we worked together for our common cause within the framework of the Inter-Religious Council of Russia!

That said, the recent years have also brought us new challenges. The COVID-19 pandemic had a serious effect on our life, with many people falling victim to the disease. We had to make difficult decisions and restrict access to our churches when the epidemic was at its peak. Despite certain problems, the clergy of our traditional religious communities managed to find new forms of spiritual care, be it on lockdown or in infectious disease wards. Unprecedently wide was the scope of work carried out by volunteers, who were helping the most vulnerable in those trying times.

The recent developments, which are part of global politics, have resulted in exacerbation of the armed conflicts that arose out of certain countries’ desire to dominate. Those countries’ actions, for instance, gave rise to the military conflicts in Ukraine and the Holy Land.

My heart aches when I think of the tragic situation in Ukraine. Russian soldiers are fighting today, in particular, for our right to freely profess our faith and live out our life based on centuries-old traditions

preserved by our peoples. We see what kind of amendments are being made nowadays to the Ukrainian laws – against the will of the majority of Ukrainians, I should note. These changes range from attempts to impose a ban on the canonical Church to suggestions of legalizing the so-called same-sex unions, prostitution and drugs. It is obvious that the aim of all these initiatives is total destruction of traditional society and that they run counter to the stance of traditional religions, including those present in Ukraine.

Our foes persist in their attempts to stir up conflicts on ethnic or religious grounds, as was clearly evidenced by the recent disorders in Dagestan. All religious leaders in our country expressly condemned the unlawful actions instigated by extremists, which took place against a backdrop of the mounting Palestine-Israel confrontation.

Jerusalem was – and remains – a holy city for Christians, Muslims and Jews. It was in the Holy Land that the milestone events in the history of relationships between God and humanity occurred. Historically, our country has had close ties with the Middle East and the peoples populating that region. The armed conflict which has broken out there again cannot but affect our communities. Believers in Russia grieve at heart as they learn of the bloodshed and civilian casualties on both sides, and resolutely denounce the methods of terror used in this war.

Our standpoint of upholding traditional values and peoples' right to their national identity finds understanding and support in many countries, especially those not associated with the so-called "collective West." Therefore, our mission today is to carry on our work aimed at promoting interfaith cooperation with all those supporting such equal relations – both in and beyond our country.

Another problem we are facing is integration of labour migrants into the Russian society. We must prevent our country from becoming a conglomeration of ethnic enclaves made up of people who don't know the Russian language or the history and traditions of the peoples of Russia. We need to consider possibilities for closer cooperation in this sphere within the framework of the Inter-Religious Council of Russia.

Religious leaders are called to help strengthen unity in the Russian society by being a model of friendship and accord. I am sure that our ancestors' and our own experience in building up interfaith peace will make its contribution to the welfare and prosperity of our society as a whole.

To conclude my address, I would like to emphasise that the Russian Orthodox Church as a co-founder of the Inter-Religious Council of Russia will continue its work for the good of the friendship and fraternal communion between representatives of the traditional religions. I believe that we are united in our common goal, which is to strengthen interfaith and inter-ethnic peace. Dear brothers, in this work we are

your like-minded partners.

Congratulations to all of you on the 25th anniversary of the foundation of the Inter-Religious Council of Russia!

I suggest that when participants in our meeting deliver their addresses we should consider and adopt a final statement to express our concerted position and solidarity on the most burning issues of the religious and social life in Russia.

Thank you for your attention.

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