



## **DECR chairman meets with leader of the Israeli Druze community**



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On December 25, Metropolitan Anthony of Volokolamsk, chairman of the Moscow Patriarchate's Department for External Church Relations (DECR), met with Sheikh Mowafaq Tarif, chairman of the Supreme Religious Council of the Druze in Israel. The spiritual leader was accompanied by Dr. Ameen Safia, honorary consul of the Russian Federation in Israel, and assistant Amir Tarif. Joining them at the meeting that took place at the DECR premises was deacon Iliya Kashitsyn, secretary for interreligious relations.

Metropolitan Anthony warmly welcomed the guests and told them about the dialogue the Russian Orthodox Church is maintaining with communities of non-Christian religions in Russia and in other countries. He underscored the significance of such dialogue at present when unanimous voice of traditional religions is much needed amidst military conflicts, violation of human rights and moral

relativism. Also, the archpastor spoke about the activities of the Interreligious Council of Russia which marks its 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary this year and shared his concerns about hostilities in the Holy Land and in Ukraine. He told the guests about barbaric persecution of the Orthodox believers in Ukraine where the situation has increasingly come to resemble the Bolshevik terror against the Russian Orthodox Church in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The spiritual leader of the Druze spoke out against the oppression of traditional religions by the state.

Sheikh Mowafaq Tarif shared his experience in the development of interreligious and interconfessional relations in Israel, spoke about the Council of Religious Community Leaders in the country and its peacekeeping activities. He emphasized that believers of different religions in the Holy Land still warmly recall the Russian presence of many years, the extensive charity and social activities of the Russian state and the Russian Orthodox Church in the past and at present that includes the construction of churches, schools, hospitals and other socially important institutions, which used to accept and continue to accept people of different nationalities and faiths.

The participants in the meeting expressed their intention to develop cooperation for the sake of peacemaking, mutual understanding and assistance to all those in need. Metropolitan Anthony gratefully accepted an invitation to visit the residence of the Chairman of the Supreme Religious Council of the Druze of Israel in the Holy Land. At the end of the meeting, the parties exchanged souvenirs.