



## His Holiness Patriarch Kirill meets with senior Russian Protestants



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On June 18, His Holiness Patriarch Kirill of Moscow and All Rus' met with the heads and representatives of Protestant churches – members of the Christian Interconfessional Consultative Committee (CICC). The meeting took place at the Patriarchal and Synodal residence in St. Daniel's Monastery in Moscow.

Representing the Protestant denominations were Eduard Grabovenko, head bishop of the Russian Church of Christians of the Evangelical Faith and co-chair of the CCIC; Vladimir A. Provorov, Archbishop of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Russia; Sergei V. Ryakhovsky, head bishop of the Russian United Fellowship of Christians of the Evangelical Faith (Pentecostals); Peter V. Mitskevich, president of the Russian Union of Evangelical Christians-Baptists; Oleg Yu. Goncharov, pastor and first

deputy chairman of the Euro-Asia division of the General Conference of the Seventh-day Adventist Church; Viktor V. Ignatenkov, senior vice-president of the Russian Union of Evangelical Christians-Baptists; Dmitry A. Taranov, head of administration of the Russian United Fellowship of Christians of the Evangelical Faith (Pentecostals); Ivan I. Borichevsky, head of administration of the Russian Church of Christians of the Evangelical Faith; Pavel V. Gonchar, head of the department for external church relations of the Moscow branch of the of Seventh-day Adventist Church; Bishop Richard Raymond Renner, President of the Good News Channel, the Russian-speaking Christian satellite network.

The Russian Orthodox Church was represented by Metropolitan Anthony of Volokolamsk, chairman of the Moscow Patriarchate's Department for External Church Relations (DECR); Archimandrite Philaret (Bulekov), DECR deputy chairman; hieromonk Mark (Akhmatkhanov) and Mr. Danil E. Arakelian of the DECR Secretariat for Inter-Christian Relations.

Addressing the participants, His Holiness Patriarch Kirill said that the good relations among religious associations, which are the CICC members, are in his opinion an important factor in the multinational society: "We show people who belong to the secular world that Christians do not quarrel like they sometimes did in old times, but work together and shape the stand that helps us maintain dialogue with society and the state."

His Holiness mentioned the joint meeting of the Interreligious Council of Russia and the Christian Interconfessional Consultative Committee held in 2020, discussed at which, among other things, were draft amendments to the Constitution of the Russian Federation, which are of great importance to religious communities.

"In particular, we supported the proposal to include a mention of God in the text of the updated Constitution. As you know, the proposal was accepted. Constitutional amendments that reinforce the idea of marriage as a union between a man and a woman are important, too. It would seem that this is an obvious truth, but against the background of all that is happening around the topic of marriage in the world, it is becoming not so obvious to many people. Our common position is that we recognize only the union of a man and a woman as marriage. I believe it to be an important contribution into international relations and cooperation with other confessions as well. Also, we insist on the right of parents to give their children education in line with their religious beliefs. Of course, our common position includes protection of national values, which are our historical and cultural heritage. The support of the Russian language and culture is of particular importance for our compatriots living abroad as our common position undoubtedly helps them cherish the memory of their Fatherland."

The Christian faith has become the core of the life of the Russian people and helped develop their strengths and cultivate their good qualities, the Patriarch noted and continued to say: "Russia has

Christian identity and is a common home for representatives of different religions and confessions.” His Holiness put emphasis on the contribution made by the Russian Orthodox Church and by representatives of other confessions into fraternal cooperation, consolidation of interreligious and interethnic peace and harmony in the country.

His Holiness Patriarch Kirill also mentioned considerable changes in relations between the Russian Orthodox Church and the evangelical movement in Russia: “We have managed to overcome all obstacles that used to stand on the way to mutual understanding and have found important common ground for dialogue and cooperation. At present, cooperation between the Moscow Patriarchate and Russian Protestants is constructive and friendly. It is aimed at upholding traditional evangelical values in society... We are of one mind on these important crucial topics.”

His Holiness focused the listeners’ attention on the persecution of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church by the Ukrainian authorities. “As you know, church buildings are being confiscated from Orthodox believers, criminal cases are being initiated against clergy for far-fetched reasons, priests and laypersons are being subjected to physical violence, and people are being imprisoned and arrested only for their religious choice.” His Holiness recalled in particular the situation with Metropolitan Jonathan of Tulchin and Bratslav, the hierarch of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church, an elderly and seriously ill man and a famous church composer. Last year he was sentenced to five years in prison with confiscation of property on absurd charges and was under house arrest during the consideration of an appeal against the verdict. On June 18, it became known that the appellate court remained the ruling of the trial court unchanged.

“Today we are witnessing the unprecedented persecution in Ukraine. Surprisingly, Western ‘truth seekers’, defenders of human rights and religious freedom, are blind to the obvious; the West takes no notice of violation of human rights and religious freedom,” His Holiness Patriarch Kirill emphasized and added with regret: “Orthodox Christians are being oppressed in the Baltic countries too, where the authorities are trying to drag the Church into political distraction.”

His Holiness called the annual Christian Youth Forum organized by the CICC an important form of interconfessional cooperation and added that discussing at these events are topics of interest to Christians today. For instance, “Christian Youth and Family Values” is the topic of the forum to be held in the Diocese of Vyborg next July.

His Holiness emphasized the importance of cooperation among the religious communities of Russia in the present situation, when Russia is facing a civilizational challenge and our people, being closely united, are rising up to it vigorously and with dignity. “I hope that our joint efforts taken for the sake of affirming the intransient Gospel values in society will not be futile, but will bring good fruits in our serious

time,” the Primate of the Russian Orthodox Church said in conclusion.

The heads of the Protestant churches in Russia noted the role played by His Holiness in the consolidation of Christian denominations in Russia and his involvement in the building of constructive cooperation with Russian Protestants aimed at affirming the evangelical values, peace and harmony in society.

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