



## **DECR Chairman participates in the meeting of the IOPS council summarizing 2024 activities**



**DECR Communication Service, 26.12.2024.**

On December 25, under the chairmanship of S.V. Stepashin, the final meeting of the Council of the Imperial Orthodox Palestine Society (IOPS) took place at the society's center.

The meeting was attended by members of the IOPS Council, including the Chairman of the Department for External Church Relations (DECR) of the Moscow Patriarchate, Metropolitan Anthony of Volokolamsk; Metropolitan Kirill of Stavropol and Nevinnomyssk; Metropolitan Dionysius of Omsk and Tavrichesk; the head of the IOPS Pilgrimage Section and Secretary of the Department for Church Charity and Social Ministry of the Russian Orthodox Church, Hegumen Seraphim (Kravchenko); A.V. Gromova, Chairman of the Supervisory Board of the Elizabeth-Sergei Enlightenment Society; E.A.

Primakov, head of Rossotrudnichestvo; O.V. Shabunovich, head of the Moscow Regional Branch of the IOPS; S.N. Ryabukhin, First Deputy Chairman of the Federation Council Committee on Budget and Financial Markets and representative of the Legislative Authority of the Ulyanovsk Region; M.V. Bibikov, Deputy Chairman of the IOPS and Vice President of the Russian National Committee of Byzantinists; Prince Grigory Gagarin; O.I. Fomin, a member of the IOPS Council; G.V. Verenich, Deputy Chairman of the IOPS; and A.I. Dolinin, Secretary of the IOPS.

A special guest of the meeting was A.L. Yurkov, Ambassador-at-Large of the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

During the official part of the meeting, the Chairman of the IOPS presented high awards of the society. The honorary commemorative badge of the Imperial Orthodox Palestine Society, the "Order of the Bethlehem Star," was awarded to Metropolitan Anthony of Volokolamsk, A.I. Dolinin, and G.L. Muradov, Deputy Chairman of the Council of Ministers of the Republic of Crimea and Permanent Representative of Crimea to the President of the Russian Federation.

In his report, S.V. Stepashin paid special attention to humanitarian activities amidst the ongoing Special Military Operation, highlighting the importance of the society's targeted support for residents and dioceses in the Donetsk and Lugansk People's Republics. Numerous humanitarian shipments continue to reach the frontlines in the Donetsk People's Republic under the banner of the IOPS and the "Christian Mercy" charitable foundation, which was established in the spring of 2022 with the blessing of His Holiness Patriarch Kirill, Chairman of the Committee of Honorary Members of the IOPS. The foundation's founders include the Imperial Orthodox Palestine Society and the Patriarchal Council for Culture of the Russian Orthodox Church.

S.V. Stepashin noted that, given the challenging international environment, the IOPS faces new challenges and tasks. The society traditionally operates in close coordination with the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Russian Orthodox Church.

Following this, Metropolitan Anthony of Volokolamsk, Deputy Chairman of the IOPS and Chairman of the DECR, conveyed greetings and best wishes on behalf of His Holiness Patriarch Kirill of Moscow and All Rus'.

Metropolitan Anthony emphasized the historically close and friendly ties between the Imperial Orthodox Palestine Society and the Russian Orthodox Church. He also expressed gratitude to S.V. Stepashin for the society's activities in the Middle East.

Thanking the council for the high award, Metropolitan Anthony assured that the Russian Orthodox Church would continue its close cooperation with the IOPS.

The meeting continued with a speech by M.L. Bogdanov, Special Representative of the President of the Russian Federation for the Middle East and Africa, Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, and Deputy Chairman of the IOPS. On behalf of Foreign Minister S.V. Lavrov, he congratulated all members of the IOPS on the upcoming holidays.

M.L. Bogdanov presented a detailed report on the situation in the Holy Land and drew attention to the complex geopolitical situation in the Middle East.

In a video conference format, reports were delivered by Antonina Kapustina, Director of the Foundation; Ruslan Ashurbeyli, Manager of the Sergiev Compound; and Archimandrite Vasian (Zmeyev), Head of the Russian Ecclesiastical Mission in Jerusalem. The speakers noted that, despite the acute military-political situation in the Middle East, the humanitarian activities of the Imperial Orthodox Palestine Society in the Holy Land have not ceased.

At the conclusion of the meeting, a number of decisions were made regarding the agenda items of the Council meeting, the IOPS website reports.

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