



His Holiness Patriarch Kirill meets with the President of Cuba



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On May 8, His Holiness Patriarch Kirill of Moscow and All Rus' met with President of the Republic of Cuba Miguel Díaz-Canel Bermúdez at the Patriarchal and Synodal residence in St. Daniel's Monastery in Moscow.

Attending the meeting on behalf of the Russian Orthodox Church were also Metropolitan Anthony of Volokolamsk, chairman of the Moscow Patriarchate's Department for External Church Relations (DECR); archpriest Nikolai Balashov, advisor to His Holiness the Patriarch of Moscow and All Rus'; archpriest Igor Yakimchuk, DECR deputy chairman; archpriest Sergiy Zvonarev, DECR secretary for far abroad countries; and priest Andrei Titushkin of the same secretariat.

The delegation accompanying Miguel Díaz-Canel Bermúdez includes Bruno Eduardo Rodríguez

Parrilla, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Cuba; Emilio Lozada García, head of the International Relations Department of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Cuba; Oscar Pérez-Oliva Fraga, Minister of Foreign Trade and Foreign Investment; H.E. Julio Antonio Garmendia Peña, Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of the Republic of Cuba to the Russian Federation; Mrs. Ileana Núñez Mordoche, Director for Europe and Canada at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs; Miguel Lamazares Puello, director general of the Protocol Division at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs; Manuel Aloma Herrera, assistant to the President of the Republic of Cuba; Mrs. Leticia Martínez Hernández, head of the Presidential press service; Nelson Tamayo Caro, head of the Foreign Minister's secretariat; and Mrs. Lis Cuesta, the wife of the President.

His Holiness Patriarch Kirill of Moscow and All Rus' cordially welcomed the distinguished guests, noting a long history of the traditionally kind and friendly relations between the two countries, "You know of the Soviet people's deep respect for Cuba not only because the Communist Party was the ruling party in our country at that time, but also because heroism of the Cuban people elicited considerable sympathy. Cuba has shown that a small country and its people can uphold their national honour, dignity and understanding of truth."

His Holiness mentioned his meetings with Cuba's state leaders over the years, including Fidel Castro Ruz, Raúl Castro Ruz, and earlier meetings with Miguel Díaz-Canel Bermúdez.

"I cannot help but recall my meetings with Fidel Castro, especially the last one. Though he was no longer in good physical shape, his strength of spirit was clearly evident." His Holiness added that he had special feelings about the meeting at which the decision was made to open a Russian Orthodox church in Havana. "I will tell you frankly that when I was going to Cuba to raise this issue with the Cuban leadership, I had some doubts. Still and all, the Communist party was the leading party in the country, and I had no idea about response. But Fidel Castro showed interest and understanding of the issue, and our suggestion was regarded with favour. The Cuban government has helped a great deal in the construction of this church. As you know, we have a large Orthodox parish now, where Russian people and people of other nationalities pray," His Holiness said and underscored that this church helps people of the two countries come closer together, being a visible evidence of friendship between Russia and Cuba.

His Holiness Patriarch Kirill spoke with gratitude about the life of Orthodox Christians in Cuba. A church was built for them, services are celebrated, and there are no problems with the manifestation of the Orthodox religiosity in the country.

"Our Orthodox church in Havana is of great importance, and not only spiritual. It is evidence that Orthodoxy and Christianity as a whole can be present as a religious belief in various political contexts,

and we welcome the way our parish in your country develops,” said the Primate of the Russian Orthodox Church.

His Holiness pointed out that some people, including those in the Western Hemisphere, received the news of an Orthodox parish in Cuba with incredulity at first, but life has proved it was the right decision. “I sincerely thank you and, through you, the government and people of Cuba for their kindness to Orthodox Christians living in your country,” said Patriarch Kirill to Miguel Díaz-Canel Bermúdez.

The Primate of the Russian Orthodox Church also spoke about his meeting with Pope Francis, which took place at Havana international airport in 2016, noting that this is evidence, among other things, of Cuba’s important significance.

“When an idea of my meeting with the Pope has started up, I began to ponder over its possible venue. I was thinking whether it would be right to hold it in the East where the Orthodox population is the majority, while a meeting in a territory with the most Catholic population would not be very convenient for us. And then it occurred to me that Cuba would be the best place. It is a traditionally Catholic country in the Western Hemisphere, but with a different political regime. Living there are people who adhere to Marxist ideology, as some do in our country. So, when we met with Pope Francis at the Havana airport, I asked him, “Do you think that we are meeting at the right time and in the right place?” And he agreed that this was so. Cuba played an important role in the development of relations between the Orthodox world and the Catholic world, between our Church and the Catholic Church. I am wholeheartedly grateful to both the Cuban leadership and the Cuban people for the arrangements for this important meeting and the atmosphere in which it was held,” said His Holiness.

It was mentioned during the talk that the Cuban people and the Cuban state have gone through very difficult periods in modern history. His Holiness Patriarch Kirill of Moscow and All Rus' emphasized, “One can hardly imagine how strong, consolidated and motivated the people should be to challenge the world around them.”

He expressed hope for further development of friendly relations between Russia and Cuba for the good of both countries, saying, “Everything that is happening today shows that the good foundation once laid in Cuban-Soviet relations helps to yield favourable results even in a situation that has changed significantly since the time of the establishment of these relations.”

Miguel Díaz-Canel Bermúdez thanked His Holiness for fond memories of his meetings with the former Cuban leaders, for kind words about heroism of the Cuban people and for wonderful relations between Cuba and the Russian Federation. He said that every time he came to Moscow, he was happy to meet with the Primate of the Russian Orthodox Church and show respect to him. Also, the President of Cuba

thanked Patriarch Kirill for his evaluation of the historical path of the Cuban people and for sharing his vision of the events of the past and the current situation.

"We have arrived in Moscow at the invitation of President Vladimir Putin to attend celebrations marking the 80th anniversary of the Victory in the Great Patriotic War. Also, today, on May 8, Russia and Cuba celebrate the 65th anniversary of the restoration of diplomatic relations," said Miguel Diaz-Canel Bermúdez. "Participation in the celebration of the Victory anniversary has profound meaning for us. At present, we see even more frequent attempts to belittle the decisive role of the USSR, its people and the Red Army in the Victory over Nazism. This Victory in the war is of paramount significance not only for the USSR, but for all humanity. The Cuban people know history well, they know that the Victory was dearly bought and that the USSR has maintained its integrity, independence and sovereignty and has liberated humanity from fascist oppression. We need to keep the historical truth, remember and honour these events in order to prevent history manipulation by the West."

Also, he noted the significance of the 65th anniversary of the restoration of diplomatic relations. "This date shows that the relations between our countries and our peoples can cope with all challenges. Over the years, we have shared many of them, maintained emotional bonds, protected each other, and developed joint projects."

The President of Cuba expressed his willingness to continue and develop good relations with the Russian Orthodox Church in the future. He believes that these relations are, among other things, a symbol of the ties between the two states. "Today, the Russian Orthodox Church has wonderful relations at the provincial, regional and municipal levels in Cuba. We are very satisfied with the work of your representative offices," he said. "I would like to note that the church of the Kazan Icon of the Mother of God in Havana plays a very active role in the life of the capital. All the people coming there are warmly welcomed and introduced to the Orthodox faith and Russian culture. Also, special efforts are made to ensure that the Cuban people learn and know the Russian language.

"The church of the Kazan icon of the Mother of God in Havana has already become a symbol of bilateral relations, and we can say that the idea that you suggested to Fidel Castro has been taken precisely, and a dream of the far future has been realized," said the President of Cuba.

He expressed regret over the death of Pope Francis and said that Cuba would have fond memories of the historic meeting between His Holiness Patriarch Kirill of Moscow and All Rus' and Pope Francis.

Miguel Diaz-Canel Bermudez also spoke about the development of relations between the two countries in different areas and about solidarity with the Russian people in the current tense international situation. The participants of the talk touched upon such topics as cultural cooperation and life of the Orthodox

parish in Havana as well as other issues of mutual interest.

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