



His Holiness Patriarch Kirill meets with President of Venezuela Nicolás Maduro



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On May 8, His Holiness Patriarch Kirill of Moscow and All Rus' met with President of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela Nicolás Maduro.

The meeting, which took place at the Patriarchal and Synodal residence in Danilov Monastery in Moscow, was also attended on behalf of the Russian Orthodox Church by Metropolitan Anthony of Volokolamsk, chairman of the Moscow Patriarchate's Department for External Church Relations (DECR); Bishop Alexy of Ramenskoye, private secretary of His Holiness Patriarch Kirill; 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.

During his stay in Moscow, Nicolás Maduro is accompanied by a delegation that includes his wife Cilia Flores; Freddy Alfred Nazareth Nández Contreras, Vice President for Communication, Culture and Tourism and Minister of People's Power for Communication and Information of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela; Anibal Eduardo Coronado Millán, Minister of Office of the President and Government Performance Monitor; Yván Eduardo Gil Pinto, Minister of Foreign Affairs; H.E. Jesús Rafael Salazar Velásquez, Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela to the Russian Federation; and Xavier Marcano, Commander of the Venezuelan Honour Guard.

His Holiness Patriarch Kirill of Moscow and All Rus' said that he was very glad to see Nicolás Maduro in Moscow and continued to say, "I recall our meeting in Caracas in October 2008 with warm feelings, and, of course, I have fond memories of your predecessor, President Hugo Chávez. You have come a long way to take part in the celebration of the 80th anniversary of our country's victory in the Great Patriotic War. Your visit testifies to your kind attitude to Russia and your understanding of the decisive role of our country in defeating fascism. We have never forgotten that your country, though not so strong at that time, raised a resolute protest against Germany's aggression, broke off diplomatic relations with it in December 1941, and shortly after declared war against it. We treasure this decisive act of courage."

The Primate of the Russian Orthodox Church noted that relations between Russia and Venezuela have been developing for over two centuries. Venezuela was the first Latin American country to come into close interaction and cooperation with Russia. Diplomatic relations between the two states were established in the year of the Great Victory over fascism, and this year marks their 80th anniversary.

Patriarch Kirill underscored that both Russia and Venezuela are currently facing strong pressure from external powers that employ unlawful restrictive measures and are trying to exert a corrosive influence on economy and even on politics and the social sphere. "However, despite the pressure, both Russians and Venezuelans continue to assert their right to independent development and counter external aggression and intrusion of political interests by other countries," His Holiness stated.

Reflecting on the reasons for these attempts to narrow development opportunities through various means, His Holiness Patriarch Kirill named the falsity of the earlier promoted idea of ideological confrontation between capitalism and the socialist system, because even after all drastic changes in economy, social and many other spheres of life in our country, it is still feeling a hostile attitude of certain quarters.

His Holiness explained it by the fact that Russia offers an alternative idea of civilizational development, "We insist not only on economic development, economic progress and the development of science, but also on the principle of justice. This has nothing to do with ideology, but concerns our national culture and our religion in particular. The idea of justice is a very important spiritual dimension of Russian

culture and of Russian people on the whole. That is why the completely different factors are being realized that create tension, also in relations of Russia with certain Western countries."

"We understand that a very important factor ensuring the real sovereignty of a nation is the degree of its consolidation," His Holiness continued. "If the people are united, also behind certain ideas and are capable of solidarity, then they become strong, even if the power of those who disagree with such a development of national life in a particular country is far greater. It is very important to have national identity formed not just by an ideology or by a certain period of history, but by our history as a whole. Therefore, we have a feeling of solidarity with all countries that are concerned about the problem of justice and fight for justice. Human civilization loses its stability and sustainability without justice. No justice means no stability. Of course, there are problems in our society at the individual level, or disagreement of some social groups, but the principle of striving for social justice is enshrined in our political philosophy and realized into practice whenever possible. All this resonates with Christian ideas and therefore resonates with our Church, which takes part to the extent possible in promoting such development of our society and state."

The Russian Orthodox Church pays great attention to interaction with compatriots abroad, said His Holiness and added, "For a variety of reasons and at different times, a considerable number of our citizens have moved to other countries, including the Latin American countries. Therefore, a care for compatriots abroad is one of the programs being realized by the state at present, in which the Church participates, holding on its own principles. There is a certain number of Russians living in your country. Through you, I would like to thank the Venezuelan authorities for having created favorable working and living environment for them. Though our Russian-speaking community in Venezuela is not large, people work there and interact with both the authorities and the public, and we are very grateful for wholesome climate in which they live."

His Holiness Patriarch Kirill of Moscow and All Rus' expressed hope for current visit of the President of Venezuela to Moscow "to become a very important stimulus for further development of relations between our countries and peoples."

"I would like to thank you for sharing your wisdom with us," said the President of Venezuela. "I am very glad to meet with you in this monastery with a rich history." Nicolás Maduro especially mentioned the meeting with Patriarch Kirill when His Holiness visited Caracas in 2008 as Metropolitan of Smolensk and Kaliningrad and chairman of the Moscow Patriarchate's Department for External Church Relations,

The president also shared his thoughts on the historically significant meeting between Patriarch Kirill of Moscow and All Rus' and Pope Francis in Havana in 2016.

Russia has a very complex history with much struggle, but it has always demonstrated enduring values, Nicolás Maduro noted, expressed solidarity with Patriarch Kirill's views and underscored, "Russia has already made a great contribution to the development of all humanity and is making an even greater contribution in times to come. We admire its history."

Nicolás Maduro dwelled on the historical roots of relationship between the peoples of the two countries and the present friendly relations that began with the visit of President of Venezuela Hugo Chávez to Russia in 2001. "Over these years, we have succeeded in building irreproachable relations. We have seen how Russia has again become a world power by its own efforts during the last two and a half decades while we were fighting for our independence in South America. Today, trust between us is high; we are going along the same road and share common values. We keep cultural identity of our regions and our countries. As a truly global power, Russia is a country that can interact with any other country on the principles of equality and respect, no matter how big or small this country is. The world is no longer unipolar," said the President of Venezuela.

He continued to say, "That is why, as much as anything else, I thought it very important to attend the celebration of the 80th anniversary of the Victory in the Great Patriotic War, because the point at issue is justice. I have come to express gratitude on behalf of all humanity, because life does not like the ungrateful, everything goes badly with them. We must be grateful to the peoples of the USSR who made the supreme sacrifice for saving the whole world from Nazism and fascism. What might have happened to the world if the Nazis and fascists had won, conquered Europe, and went to other countries and continents? It is impossible even to think about it. The Victory won 80 years ago cannot be compared with any other victory in many centuries."

President Maduro thanked the Primate of the Russian Orthodox Church for his efforts to promote dialogue among religions, cultures and civilizations.

The talk covered a range of topics of mutual interest.

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