



THE RUSSIAN ORTHODOX CHURCH
Department for External Church Relations

Address by His Holiness Patriarch Kirill at the 2nd Russia–Africa Summit



On 27 July 2023, a plenary session of the Russia-Africa Economic and Humanitarian Forum was held in St. Petersburg as part of the Second Russia-Africa Summit. His Holiness Patriarch Kirill of Moscow and All Russia addressed the forum with a report on topical issues of Russian-African relations and the mission of the Russian Orthodox Church on the African continent.

Address

by Patriarch Kirill of Moscow and All Russia

at the 2nd Russia–Africa Summit

St. Petersburg, 27th July 2023

Your Excellency esteemed Vladimir Vladimirovich,

President of the Russian Federation

Your Excellency dear Mr Azali Assoumani,

President of the Union of Comoros

Esteemed leaders and senior representatives of African countries,

Extending my warm greetings to all of you, I thank for inviting me to speak at such a high-level meeting aimed at promoting cooperation between Russia and African countries. This forum is indeed a notable international event with a significant political, economic, religious and cultural dimension.

Despite a great geographical distance between them, peoples of our countries have good long-standing relations. The secret behind their friendship is that Russia has never viewed the continent of Africa as a land to derive benefit from or as a target of colonization. Never has Russia spoken with African nations in an arrogant manner, from a position of superiority and power. In times of hardships, we always strived to show solidarity and offer help. When African countries were going through a difficult and critical period, fighting for their independence and self-determination, Russia tried to actively support them and later worked together with those nations at building up a peaceful life and developing many infrastructure projects. It is noteworthy that such cooperation continues to this day.

Our mutual good feelings are time-tested, based, among other things, on our shared understanding of fundamental tenets underlying human life and our deep commitment to the imperishable moral values. Being faithful to traditions, seeing family as a union between a man and a woman, loving and respecting one's own history, striving for goodness and justice – all these essential principles of our civilization are of overriding importance to people in both Russia and Africa who cherish their spiritual and cultural identity. These principles are so important to us that we are ready to uphold and defend them.

And sometimes defending them means acting in rather adverse circumstances. Over the past several decades, the world has undergone radical changes. It refers not so much to the political map, economic processes or technological progress as to that dangerous spiritual and moral climate which is being created through active and even aggressive efforts of many Western countries. Moral relativism, the cult of profit and consumption, freedom misinterpreted as all-permissiveness, a threat of destruction facing the institution of traditional family – these are just a few of the adversities we face because of the system of values, or rather anti-values, imposed

by certain forces in the West, for their adoption inevitably leads to humanity's cultural and spiritual degradation.

Thank God, it is seen as a serious hazard not only in Russia, where laws are being adopted with the view of shielding society from propaganda of the culture alien to us and from trends, unwholesome morality-wise, but in African countries as well. I know that despite colossal pressure, the overwhelming majority of African countries strongly oppose legislative legalization of the so-called same-sex unions, euthanasia and other sinful doings. Undoubtedly, our stance on these matters is what brings us closer together. We act based on the same fundamental principles and are always happy to meet with those who share our ideas.

It is wonderful that Africa plays more and more important role in international relations, as is evidenced by the African countries' peace-making initiatives and their active involvement in resolving continent-related and global problems. It is my conviction that together Russia and Africa will be able to offer to the world a constructive model of international relationships based on honesty and justice.

Unfortunately, not everyone in the international community is ready to engage in equal dialogue. Some of the Western states still cannot "let go" of their colonialist past, following this pattern in the way they think and act.

It is my hope that fostering good relations between Russia and African countries will help uphold traditional moral values in our world.

Inciting interfaith enmity is another felonious instrument used in today's politics. It grieves to point out that such phenomena have become dangerously widespread on the African continent. Unfortunately, it is Christians who are being subjected to most severe persecution. Taking this opportunity, as the Primate of the Russian Orthodox Church I earnestly and with a heavy heart appeal to all those who have means and real authority to influence this tragic situation, urging them to do everything within their power to defend persecuted Christians in Africa.

As the past few decades and the history of many regional conflicts have shown, masterminding and financing provocations on religious grounds are often those who want to weaken a certain country from within and act based on a well-known "divide-and-rule" strategy. It is vital to prevent any attempts to stir up interfaith hatred, especially considering multi-confessional and multi-ethnic nature of the majority of African countries.

Cultural and ethnic diversity is what every country needs to cherish as treasure. In this regard, Russia has valuable experience accumulated over the centuries which it is willing to share. We are a country of more than hundreds of nationalities. Harmoniously coexisting here are representatives of different religions and confessions, such as Orthodox Christians, Catholics, Protestants, Muslims, Jews, and Buddhists. Living side by side with one another, we freely profess our faith and

cooperate in educational, humanitarian, peace-making, social and other spheres.

The Russian Orthodox Church, mindful of its special responsibility for the future of the peoples historically associated with it, strives to foster in a person faithfulness to God's truth, respect for tradition and love for his/her country.

Not long ago, the Russian Orthodox Church established the Patriarchal Exarchate of Africa and is now working on the African continent, taking pastoral care of the Russian citizens living there and local Orthodox Christians. The necessity to promote our activities in Africa arose as a response to a schism in the Orthodox world.

At the same time, there is nothing unprecedented in the Russian Orthodox Church's presence in the African land. First Russian parishes were opened on the continent as far back as the 19th and early 20th centuries.

In Abyssinia, Russian churches were built in 1889 and 1896. In Egypt, a permanent parish of the Russian Orthodox Church was set up in 1914. Following the revolution in Russia, with more and more people fleeing the country, new parishes started opening in Africa. In 1920, a church was consecrated in Tunisia; in 1922, a parish was established in Algeria; in 1927, Russian Orthodox parishes appeared in the territory of Morocco. In 1998, I had the honour to consecrate the first Russian church in South Africa.

From 1971 to 2016, in my capacity as chairman of the Moscow Patriarchate's Department for External Church Relations and then as Patriarch I visited 18 African countries. I have been to the north, south, east and west of Africa, as well as to its central regions. My meeting with Mr Nelson Mandela in his house in Soweto in the early November of 1990 was particularly important to me. That year, on 11th February, he was released from prison, and it seems to me that I was the first foreigner he received at the time. Mr Mandela asked me to convey to the Soviet authorities his gratitude for their decisive help in supporting and providing him with everything necessary for fighting against the apartheid regime. As you know, in 1994 he became President of South Africa. And now let me get back to our current agenda.

To our deep regret, in 2019 the Primate of the Greek Church of Alexandria, Patriarch Theodoros, acting under external pressure and in flagrant violation of church canons, made a decision to recognize a certain schismatic organization in Ukraine. Those deplorable events prompted the Russian Orthodox Church, as I have already mentioned, to establish the Patriarchal Exarchate of Africa in December 2021 with the view of offering spiritual guidance to the Russian citizens residing in Africa and to the local Christians who expressed their wish to become a part of the ancient Orthodox tradition preserved by the Russian Church.

For a year and a half since its establishment, the Patriarchal Exarchate of Africa

has opened over 200 (two hundred) parishes in 25 (twenty-five) African countries. While developing liturgical life in its communities, the Exarchate has also started implementing many humanitarian and educational projects, which include, among many other things, translating books into local languages. Thanks to the establishment and intensive activities of the Exarchate, Africans now demonstrate great interest in the Russian Orthodox Church.

What many people value is that we are a Church that preserves and cherishes the Apostolic succession in its doctrine, sacraments and spiritual experience – a Church that does not distort God-given norms of morality in favour of some fashionable ideological trends.

Developing our pastoral activities, we strive to make our contribution to the strengthening of Russia-Africa ties, to improve people's welfare. Wherever our parishes open, there are new schools, water wells, electric substations, hospitals and cultural centres.

We are willing to build up constructive relationships with other religious organizations in Africa.

Our parishes receive official registration in full conformity with local legislation. And I would like to thank leaders of the countries where our parishes have been registered. The Moscow Patriarchate is open for any initiatives beneficial for people, aimed at building up peace and helping the suffering.

With sentiments of affection, I address people living on the African continent, invoking God's blessing upon you. May the Lord grant peace and welfare to the peoples of your countries and may He give wisdom, patience and strength to state leaders.

Hopefully, this forum will mark a new step in furthering cooperation between our nations in all areas of social life.

I thank you for your attention and wish you success in your work.