

Patriarch Kirill and French president discuss Christians' plight in Middle East

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Patriarch Kirill of Moscow and All Russia

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PARIS, December 5 /TASS/. Patriarch of Moscow and All Russia Kirill and French President Francois Hollande met in the Elysee Palace in Paris on Monday to discuss protecting Christians in the Middle East and the peacekeeping effort in Ukraine.

President Hollande met the head of the Russian Orthodox Church on the porch of the Elysee Palace. After that, the two retired behind the closed doors leaving the journalists to wait outside.

"Human fates and human lives are paramount. That is why Pope Francis and I discussed that theme at our meeting in Havana. The Russian Orthodox Church is ready to cooperate with all the parties who want to defend the Christian presence in the Middle East," Patriarch Kirill said.

The patriarch also briefed President Hollande on the Russian Orthodox Church's position on the Ukrainian conflict. He noted specially that unlike some religious communities in Ukraine, the Russian Orthodox Church had backed the peacekeeping approach to the Ukrainian crisis. "We believe that a peacekeeping effort exerted by the Church is the only mechanism capable of reconciling people in Ukraine. In this sense, the peacekeeping mission of the Russian Orthodox Church plays a special role," Patriarch Kirill stressed.

He thanked France's president for an opportunity to build the Saint Trinity Cathedral on Branly Embankment and the Russian religious and cultural center in Paris. Patriarch Kirill said that he was sure that the place would become a venue for developing religious and humanitarian initiatives between Russia and France.

President Hollande also noted that France supported the Christian minority in Syria and Iraq and welcomed all the proposals, including religious initiatives, to settle the Middle East crisis. In addition, the French president believes that the implementation of the Minsk Accords is the most important thing for the Ukrainian settlement.

The French leader praised Patriarch Kirill's historic meeting with Pope Francis that took place in Havana this past February. He also welcomed the consecration of a church located in the territory of the Russian religious and cultural center in Paris in October 2016. Both Hollande and Patriarch Kirill considered it to be another step towards bolstering cultural initiatives between Russia and France.

On December 3, Patriarch Kirill began his primatial visit to the Diocese of Korsun that will last until December 7. Apart from Paris, Patriarch Kirill will also conduct religious festivities in Zurich, Switzerland, devoted to the 80th anniversary of the foundation of the Church in the name of Christ's Resurrection.

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