

**Address by His Holiness the Patriarch Kirill of Moscow and All Russia at the
137th Assembly of the Inter-Parliamentary Union
(St Petersburg, 16 October 2017)**

Distinguished Parliamentarians!

I thank you for the invitation to attend this august assembly. For many a year the Russian Orthodox Church has been engaged in an open and interested dialogue with parliamentarians in many countries where our dioceses and parishes are located. We see it happen in Russia, in Ukraine, in Belarus and in other countries that fall within the canonic territory of the Moscow Patriarchate as well as in other countries where our Church is carrying out its ministry.

From the outset, I would like to announce the main subject of my today's address, which is **the need to find a moral consensus in the world of today and to build justice on its basis**. Certainly, I am first and foremost concerned with this subject as Patriarch, as a priest. At the same time, I am confident that a moral consensus is the only possible basis, the only possible universal foundation for a peaceful coexistence of different cultures and peoples in the world of today. And it is a complex, volatile and unpredictable world.

As you will recall, in the early 1990s that saw the end the decade-long ideological confrontation of two systems as well as the collapse of the bipolar international order, many were saying that soon 'a brave new world' would emerge that would be stable, predictable, prosperous and very secure. This future was premised upon the victory of values perceived as universal back then. Francis Fukuyama's clever invention, 'the end of history', was pronounced as the final destination of humanity's social and cultural development that had allegedly reached its peak with one single aim to follow henceforth, namely to distribute throughout the whole world these universal liberal values that would be certain to triumph eventually.

And yet, the last decade of the twentieth century and the second decade of the twenty-first century have made it apparent that those values that were posited as fundamental and universal, as the sole source of happiness for humanity, have failed to stand the test of time. Alas, the world is no safer, no more predictable or stable than before.

Still, the ongoing quest for something to ensure stability throughout these years in the life of many countries as well as in international relations, has revealed some well-pronounced trends towards a greater role for traditional religions in society and culture based on religion's fundamental nature and the desire to preserve a moral basis of society.

For a very long time and to an extent up until today, lawmaking has retained a link to the moral precepts built into the human nature by the Creator. In today's world, however, we often see attempts to ignore this link, which results inevitably in a debate on the relation between morality, justice and the law, and a discussion about values that underlie social development of today's free world or should do so.

You represent parliaments of the world and your prime task is to coordinate different, often divergent, interests and to establish justice in the form of law. But what forms can this justice take? In Ancient Greece and Rome justice was personified by the goddesses Themis and Iustitia respectively. Up until now the English word justice is seen as solely following to the letter the norms and regulations, including in courts.

But there is also the Greek concept of Δικαιοσύνη which also signifies 'justice' and 'righteousness.' This interpretation is of great import as it attests yet again to the fundamental link between justice and morality as well as righteousness. The etymology of the Russian word 'spravedlivost' (justice), too, refers us to the notion of Divine Truth.

It is impossible to bring into harmony the interests within a state, let alone in the international arena, if justice is severed from a solid moral foundation that has stood the test of centuries. The moral precepts and norms carried on by human nature itself as well as religions for thousands of years, are not a restraint on man's freedom. Nor do they serve as a pretext to encroach upon man's rights. We are confident that man cannot live in peace, quiet and happiness if society lacks shared moral values that enjoy the utmost support of both the public and the state. The value of freedom cannot be implemented without the responsibility that a free man voluntarily assumes. This choice can be made based on various religious views but it always rests upon a universal moral imperative.

Presently, in many countries values are construed in political and philosophical categories that often lack connection to national cultural and historical context. And even though the 'end of history' concept I mentioned earlier has been relegated to the periphery of the scholarly and expert discussion, some societies still hail these political values as an ideal, proclaiming them to be universal. If so, they argue, they have to be extended to the whole world in their current form with no regard for the cultural and historical context of countries or societies. As an example, they are telling people that there is such a value as human freedom. Yes, this value is incontestable. But national parliaments have increasingly less legal latitude in freely setting this value's definition without external pressure or supervision of those political systems that claim to be the supreme authority.

You represent more than 150 national legislative institutions. Each one of them possesses traditions and unique identity that command respect. For this reason precisely your communication with one another is of interest to you. You are

different, which constitutes your asset. If the Inter-Parliamentary Union were to turn into a uniform parliament, it would be equally distant from the aspirations and hopes of people living in all the countries you represent here. And it would be utterly unable to help express and enshrine in law such norms as would truly help each person to find happiness.

That said, despite all the differences between cultures, peoples or institutions, we all possess a moral feeling, each one of us has a conscience. In other words, to borrow a term that was once very popular, our differences are nothing but a superstructure whereas **the moral feeling is the genuine foundation, the truly universal trait of human nature that we are endowed with at birth.** It has not been made up by those same persons who have invented the ‘genuine universal values’ that can accordingly be adjusted at any time, ‘improved,’ as it were, to suit some political, ideological or even financial and economic interests. Human person has a universal value not because human being is but an abstraction and because there are norms of a contract-based rational moral system. It is no so. We see a concurrence in the ethics of different religious traditions, an appeal to human conscience, which we, Christians, call the voice of God in our hearts. The world religions have different precepts as well as dogmas, yet once we step into the realm of ethics, once we speak of the fundamental requirements for peaceful coexistence of human beings, **different religious traditions reveal a moral consensus.** There is a good reason for ‘the Golden Rule’ of ethics which the Gospel formulates as ‘As ye would that men should do to you, do ye also to them likewise’ (Luke 6:31). We believe, this profound feeling forms the basis for a moral consensus of humanity.

Let me cite you an example. In many national cultures there is a notion of a positive protagonist. Be it in visual arts, in literature or in cinema, the villain cannot serve as a role model. Even when a villain is portrayed in an appealing manner, the forces of good always emerge victorious while the villain is defeated and at best deserves our pity. It is, too, a testimony to the unity of human moral nature. And it is precisely this moral nature that has to be protected by religion, culture, education and by law.

Moral imperatives influence directly not just the human life, but that of society, the state and international relations. And there are no grounds to hold that human conscience and the motivation behind a person’s actions are insignificant or that they are of no interest to anyone outside the realm of private life. It is alleged that man should follow the law, whilst everything else is of secondary importance.

I am certain that the true value of the law is only revealed when it is based upon the moral feeling of man, when the requirements of the law are in accord with human conscience. A law that has lost its link to the moral nature of man does not move our hearts and becomes useless, if not pernicious, to society. Such a law could start to shield the vice, in the end, resulting in society’s moral downfall. As we recall, in the twentieth century our country attempted to create ‘a new man’ by substituting

ethical norms for ideological expediency embodied in law. Regrettably, the ideas of improving man based on an ideology are still alive. So today the severing of the link between the law and morality has resulted in something unprecedented in human history: what has traditionally been seen as a violation of moral principles is pronounced a law. And it happens because ideological values rather than the very essence of moral foundation, have been recognized as universal.

The moral consensus of humanity can only be established through shared values rooted in human conscience, that cannot be turned to either ideological or political purposes. Through an inter-religious dialogue representatives of different traditions grasp this universal moral value, overcome mistrust, work together against radicalism and defend their position with regard to issues that have a moral dimension.

My meeting with Pope Francis in February 2016 was an example of this unity of position on traditional family, on the fight against terrorism and pseudo-religious extremism. We spoke together against the persecutions against Christians in the Middle East and North Africa. This meeting and political and social leaders' response to it have clearly demonstrated both the need for and a chance of a shared moral consensus in today's world.

We have ongoing contacts with Protestant denominations, the World Council of Churches. We have been working with them for several decades now, standing for peace and addressing regional conflicts.

We are pursuing our dialogue with Muslim communities of different countries to reinforce our shared moral values, our trust and friendship.

The humanitarian situation in Syria has raised a genuine concern throughout all of our Church, our parishioners having organized the collection and delivery of aid to Syrians, both Christians and other communities.

The moral imperative is also what impels our Church to contribute to the Nagorno-Karabakh settlement that brings together the Christian leaders of Armenia and the Muslim leaders of Azerbaijan on an equal footing. Early in September 2017 Moscow hosted a trilateral meeting of our three countries' spiritual leaders to address this matter. The meeting adopted a document stating the need to change the very perception of the issue. It also attested to the peacekeeping potential of religions that helps us surmount such differences as would be difficult to overcome in other contexts.

In the same vein, the Russian Orthodox Church has adopted a peacekeeping position regarding the civil conflict in Ukraine, consistently advocating national reconciliation and rejection of feuds and violence. We are seeing attempts at drawing the Church into the confrontation, at making it take one side or the other. But the

Church is consistently and firmly pursuing the end of confrontation in society. I reiterate yet again that today apart from the canonical Ukrainian Orthodox Church there is no other force in Ukrainian society to serve as a basis for the conflict's settlement.

Now, while lamenting the absence of Ukrainian parliamentarians at this assembly, I cannot but point out the ongoing legislative attempts in Ukraine to discriminate against the Ukrainian Orthodox Church solely for its canonical link to the Patriarch of Moscow. The draft laws promoted by radicals will set up conditions for a bureaucratic interference within the internal affairs of parishes and dioceses, further aggravating the religious divide of Ukrainian society. As demonstrated by the massive religious procession for peace in Ukraine, the Orthodox Church there speaks exclusively in favour of intra-Ukrainian peace. Such legislative attempts seek only to turn the Church as well as its members into a tool for internal political strife. This is utterly unacceptable. I should like to ask you to heed this situation most seriously.

The Inter-Religious Council of Russia that brings together representatives from Russia's traditional denominations (Christian Orthodoxy, Islam, Judaism and Buddhism) regularly expresses a common moral position on issues of state and social development. We have an enormous experience of good-neighbourliness, and we are further following the path of brotherly cooperation. In most cases, we arrive at a moral consensus, come up with a position on social matters that have a moral dimension, and transmit this position to the Russian parliamentarians. Thus, we have managed to secure the adoption of a law limiting gambling in Russia, as its omnipresence had a negative effect on the lives of many people.

For several years now, under the auspices of the annual 'Christmas Readings' Church Forum we have been holding Christmas Parliamentary Meetings where the Patriarch and other representatives of the Russian Orthodox Church, together with the members of the upper and lower chambers of the Russian Parliament, talk about important issues in the relations between the Church and the state, the Church and society. No longer merely a good tradition, these meetings have provided a strong impetus to a joint search for that very moral consensus that lays the foundation for lawmaking.

Our Church also takes part in the work of the Interparliamentary Assembly on Orthodoxy that unites 27 countries. Back in 2007 my predecessor Patriarch Alexy II was speaking at the Council of Europe Parliamentary Assembly. Today, addressing the 137th Assembly of the Inter-Parliamentary Union I am glad to follow up on this tradition of interaction between the Russian Orthodox Church and popular representatives.

Distinguished representatives of world parliaments!

Allow me to thank you once again for the invitation, for your attention and to call you to pursue further the task of lawmaking whose ultimate goal is the triumph of the ideals of good, justice and love in society. And that confers upon you an enormous moral responsibility for the future of your peoples and humankind itself.