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Russian Patriarch Kirill and Pope Francis Meet in Cuba, Sign Declaration

By The Moscow Times

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Pope Francis, left, reaches to embrace Russian Orthodox Patriarch Kirill after signing a joint declaration at the Jose Marti International airport in Havana, Cuba, Feb. 12, 2016.

Head of the Russian Orthodox Church Patriarch Kirill and Pope Francis met for the first time on Saturday in Havana, Cuba and the meeting concluded with the two men signing a joint declaration, the Interfax news agency reported.

After two hours of "open and fraternal talks," Patriarch Kirill announced that the Russian Orthodox Church and the Catholic Church could now work together all over the world.

"We discussed quite a number of initiatives that we can work on together," said Pope Francis, adding that he felt "the presence of the Holy Spirit" during the talks.

One of the main points of the declaration was the need to defend persecuted Christians.

"We call on the world community to unite against violence and terrorism," the document

reads.

The church leaders also discussed the benefits of the European integration, but said that Europe needs to protect the rights of religious believers. They warned against “integration that does not respect religious identity.”

The declaration establishes the notion of the family that is shared by both churches — it describes marriage as a free act of love and fidelity between a man and a woman — and also confired the shared negative attitudes toward abortion and euthanasia.

“We are not rivals, but brothers,” the statement declares. “We urge Catholic and Orthodox believers of the world to learn to live in peace, love and harmony.”

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