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‘God Put You in Power’: Russian Orthodox Leader Tells Putin on 70th Birthday

By AFP

October 07, 2022



Patriarch Kirill. **Kirill Zykov / Moskva News Agency**

The head of the Russian Orthodox Church Patriarch Kirill said Friday that Vladimir Putin's reign over Russia had been mandated by God, congratulating the Kremlin chief on his 70th birthday.

"God put you in power so that you could perform a service of special importance and of great responsibility for the fate of the country and the people entrusted to your care," the patriarch said, joining a chorus of Russian officials congratulating Putin.

The patriarch praised Putin for "transforming the image of Russia, strengthening its sovereignty and its defense capability, protecting its national interests."

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Kirill wished "health and a long life" to the Russian president who has been in power for more than 20 years.

He also called on worshippers across the country to pray for Putin's health.

"You gained the reputation of a national leader selflessly devoted to the Fatherland, sincerely loving the Motherland and giving all its strength to it," the patriarch said.

Kirill also wished him "unrelenting strength and God's abundant assistance."

The leader of the Russian Orthodox Church since 2009, Kirill has been a vocal supporter of the military operation in Ukraine.

He has close ties with Putin's government, backing conservative values over Western liberalism.

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