THE RUSSIAN ORTHODOX CHURCH
Department for External Church Relations

Address by His Holiness Patriarch Kirill of Moscow and All Russia at the opening of the 2nd Summit of World Religious Leaders in Baku

On 14th November 2019, the 2nd Summit of World Religious Leaders began its work in Baku. His Holiness Patriarch Kirill of Moscow and All Russia delivered an address. Its text is given below.

Your Excellency, dear Mr. President,

Your Excellency Mrs. Mehriban Aliyeva,

Esteemed Sheikh-ul-Islam Allahshukur Pashazadeh, my dear brother,

Your Eminences and Your Graces,

Dear religious leaders,

With great joy I have arrived in Baku at the invitation of the Government of Azerbaijan and Sheikh-ul-Islam Allahshukur Pashazadeh, the hospitable host of the summit. I would like to express my appreciation to the President of the Republic, Mr. Ilham Aliyev, for rendering all-round support to this significant event and for his speech.

For almost ten years that have passed since the 1st Summit of World Religious Leaders was held in Baku in April 2010, new tendencies in the sphere of interfaith relations have become clear, and new challenges have been posed to traditional religions. In recent years in Baku and in many countries all over the world numerous interreligious and intercultural events have taken place under the auspices of Azerbaijan, which are to give a concerted response to the complex issues of our time. To a large extent thanks to the efforts of the head of the Caucasus Muslim Board, esteemed Sheikh-ul-Islam Allahshukur Pashazadeh, Azerbaijan has become an important platform for conducting interfaith dialogue at the global level.

The recent decades have been darkened by numerous conflicts in various parts of the world, as well as by the unprecedented wild outburst of terrorism. Terrorists are shedding blood of innocent civilian people. Sri Lanka, New Zealand, Syria, Iraq, Afghanistan, Germany, France – this is not the full list of the countries where some of the world-shaking terrorist attacks have occurred over the last two years.

We have to admit that a war is being waged against the traditional religions. It is going on in cities, towns and villages, in information space and, what is foremost, in human minds and souls. What is especially dangerous is that fighting on the front lines in this war are representatives of the younger generation. Extremist movements' ideologists take advantage of the young people's lack of life experience and their willingness to defend their views at all costs. All this is aggravated by a very low awareness and insufficient general knowledge not only of other religions, but even of their own religious tradition.

We all know what enormous resources are being used today to conduct information warfare. Of course, we, religious leaders, are used to constant verbal attacks. Evil forces have never abandoned attempts to blacken those who devoted their life to the service of God. However, it does not mean that we should stay calm while seeing our energetic and promising youth allow some unscrupulous people to deceive and take advantage of them.

Why does the extremists' propaganda achieve some success? I suppose, first of all, because they exploit the rejection by religious leaders of the modern secular paradigm. When being constantly told that the main thing in life is success, wealth and pleasures, a believer cannot but protest against such aggressive obtrusion of false values. The crisis of the system of traditional values leaves ample room for the activities of extremist recruiters. They easily replace the secular ideology with their own ideology, and their seeds fall into the well-prepared ground.

Therefore, we as religious leaders must not only reject and denounce extremism, but also cultivate in society the unshakable values based on the Holy Scripture – such as family, marriage, respect for elders, respect for religion and religious choice of a human being, and support for the suffering and the destitute. And we should actively spread these ideas substantiated by convincing examples in the information space.

Today we have an excellent opportunity to demonstrate our solidarity and care for our suffering brothers and sisters. I mean the region of the Middle East, whose population has been greatly affected by the devastating bloody conflicts of the recent years. It is painful to see what damage terrorists inflicted on Syria and Iraq.

The Middle Eastern crisis has been the course for mass migration. Regrettably, not all migrants have been ready to cooperate with the native population of the countries wherein they arrived. Many of them

lacked the basic culture of interfaith and interethnic communication. For this reason such initiatives as today's summit are of particular importance.

Today secularism is spreading ever more rapidly in society, challenging the presence of religion in it. Adherents of the secular idea think that repudiation of religion serves the common good of all people. In view of the active development of information technologies, propagated in society is the image of religious organizations as obsolete ones, imposing the constricted worldview and out-of-date notions of morality. At the same time, rejected along with religiousness are the traditional moral values, in particular, marriage as the union between man and woman, and inviolability of human life from conception to natural death. As for those who find strength and courage to publicly criticize the unnatural and immoral permissiveness, they are being accused of intolerance by representatives of the secular ideology.

We take to heart the situation in Europe which was once a stronghold of Christianity and which is now rapidly losing its religious identity.

Assembled in this hall are representatives of various religious traditions. Despite objective differences in our doctrines, we have identical views on the issues of public morality. Our common duty and joint task is to bear witness to the moral guidelines in human life.

With one voice religious leaders can and must appeal to political leaders. The time has come to unequivocally state that an end must be put to the practice of accomplishing geopolitical tasks at the expense of someone who is weaker, including the weaker states. The time has come to stop the irresponsible division of energy sources. The time has come to stop dividing up countries into the first, the second and the third ones. We want the more developed and richer states to realize their responsibility for the fate of humanity. They should be guarantors of security and stability, rather than dictators of the global order. As evidenced in practice, nothing good comes when certain states obtrude their rules, traditions and culture upon the others. Uniqueness and freedom of peoples is the key to their safe and peaceful co-existence. It is of utmost importance that the rapacious natural resource extraction in poor countries and environmental pollution should stop. We are responsible for God's creation, for what was created for the good of human beings. We address our message to each and every person and sincerely hope that it will be heard.

I would also like to mention the problem of persecution of religious minorities. As the Primate of the largest Local Orthodox Church, I have to raise the issue of discrimination of believers in a number of countries, including my brothers and sisters in faith who often suffer persecutions. The irreversible damage has been inflicted on the Christian presence in the Middle East – the holy land for all the Abrahamic religions. The history shows that Christians, Muslims and Jews have lived together in this

land for centuries. And today they are equally responsible for preserving peace.

When speaking of the persecution of Christians, we cannot disregard the problem of Africa. Many countries to the south of Sahara are suffering from the uncontrolled actions of extremist groups. For instance, in Nigeria Christians are being subjected to real genocide. I call upon all people of good will to devote attention to the problems of Christians in the African countries.

I am convinced that by means of dialogue religious leaders can make a serious contribution to the resolution of the problems facing humanity these days. Our voice will be convincing when we speak in concert and in solidarity. I am convinced that together we can bear witness to the peace-making vocation, for which we are responsible before the Most High. It is my sincere wish that today's forum may confirm it.

We have gathered together here for one more important and pleasant reason – to celebrate the 70th birthday of Sheikh-ul-Islam Allahshukur Pashazadeh. It speaks volumes that coming to Baku are authoritative religious leaders from all over the world. It is a sign, first of all, of the highest authority that the esteemed Sheikh-ul-Islam enjoys. For several decades we have known him as a consistent advocate of friendship and dialogue between religions and peoples.

It brings me great pleasure to greet our dear Sheikh with his 70th birthday and present him with the award of the Russian Orthodox Church – the Order of St. Seraphim of Sarov, 1st class – in consideration of his support for the Russian Orthodox Church in its peace-making ministry and on the occasion of his 70th birthday.

Source: https://mospat.ru/en/news/45924/