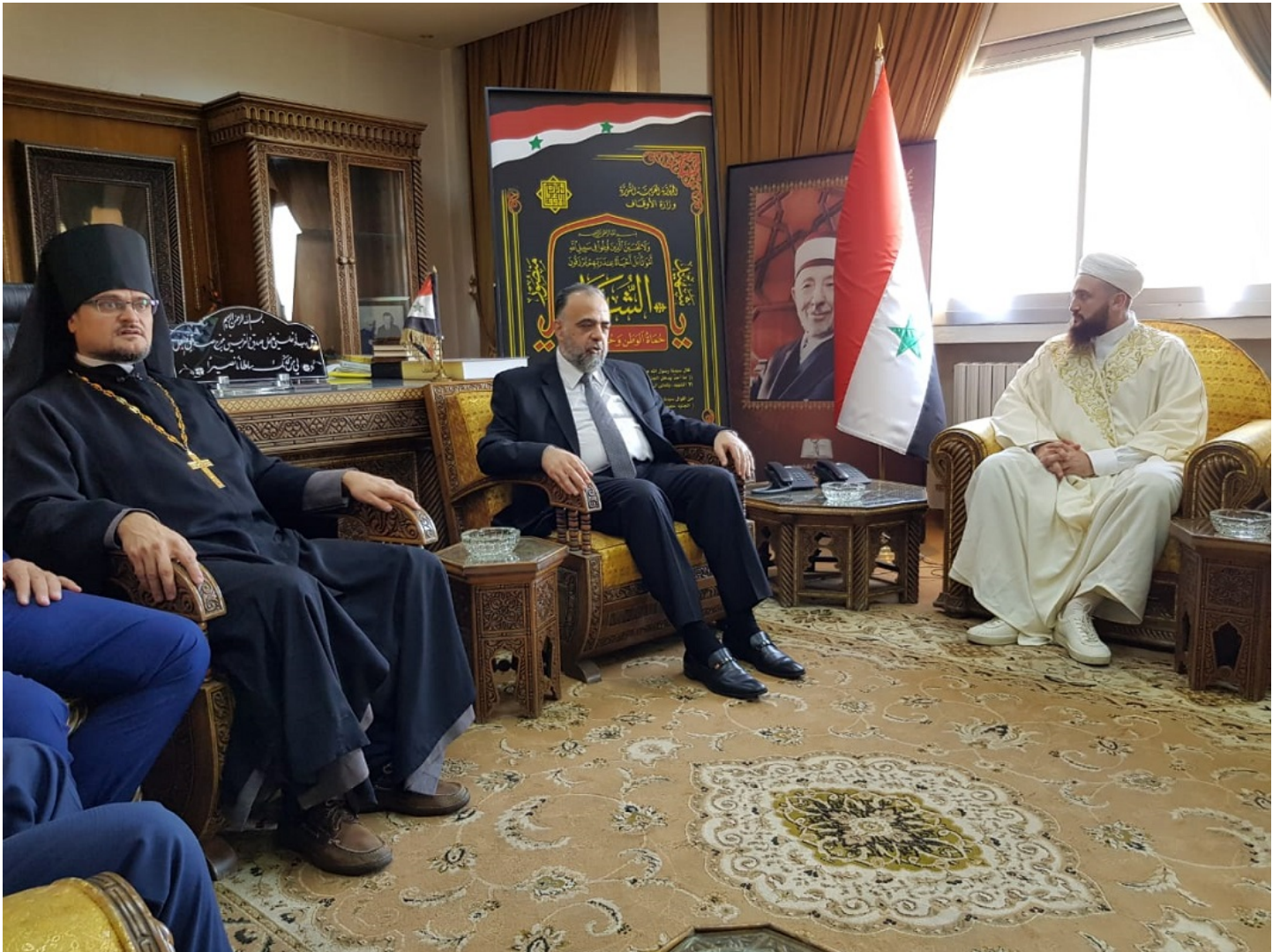




## Interreligious delegation from Russia visits Damascus



On 22<sup>nd</sup> September 2019, a delegation of the Interreligious Working Group for the Aid to the Population of Syria of the Council for Cooperation with Religious Associations under the President of Russia began its visit to Damascus. In the course of the visit, an opening ceremony of a general education school in the Barzeh neighbourhood of Damascus will take place. The school was damaged during the hostilities in Syria and restored through the efforts of the Working Group.

With the blessing of His Holiness Patriarch Kirill of Moscow and All Russia, the Working Group is headed by Hieromonk Stefan (Igumnov), secretary for inter-Christian relations of the Moscow Patriarchate's Department for External Church Relations. The delegation visiting Syria also includes Mr. S.A. Melnikov, executive secretary of the Council for Cooperation with Religious Associations under the President of Russia; Mufti Kamil Samigullin, head of the Muslim Spiritual Board of the Republic of Tatarstan; Imam Muhtasib Ildar Ziganshin of the Tumen Region, a member of the Presidium of the

Central Muslim Spiritual Board of Russia; Mufti Albir Krganov, chairman of the Spiritual Assembly of Muslims of Russia; Mufti Askarby Kardanov, chairman of the Muslim Spiritual Board of the Republic of Adygea and the Krasnodar Krai; Pastor O.Yu. Goncharov, first deputy chairman of the Euro-Asia Division of the General Conference of the Seventh-day Adventist church; Bishop D.D. Shatrov of St. Petersburg and the Leningrad Region of the Associated Russian Union of Christians of Evangelical Faith; Hieromonk Yermogen (Korchukov), executive director of the Interreligious Foundation for Implementation of Joint Humanitarian Projects, oikonomos of the Zaikonospassky Monastery in Moscow; Mr. Jean-François Thiry, representative of the Conference of the Catholic Bishops of Russia; Imam Muhtasib Salikh Ibragimov of the Nizhnekamsk District of the Republic of Tatarstan; Imam Muhtasib I. Shalakhov of the Central Mosque in Maykop; Imam M. Mirsayapov, head of the International Department of the Spiritual Assembly of Muslims of Russia; Mr. O.V. Shabunevich, acting head of the Moscow office of the Imperial Orthodox Palestine Society; Mr. Hassan Nasralla, chairman of the Arab Diaspora Regional Non-Governmental Organization; Mr. O.I. Fomin, president of the "RUSSAR" Charity Foundation; and representatives the "Combat Brotherhood" All-Russian Organization of Veterans, Ms. N.A. Kuskova and Mr. M. Mutavvadzh.

Upon arrival in Damascus the delegation from Russia met with Mr. Alexander Yefimov, Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of the Russian Federation to the Syrian Arab Republic.

That was followed by a meeting with Sheikh Mohammad Abdul-Sattar al-Sayyed, Minister of Awqaf of the Syrian Arab Republic, who warmly greeted the guests and noted that the activities of the Working Group are well known in Syria and appreciated by the Syrian people. Sheikh al-Sayyed expressed his gratitude to the Russian state and religious communities of Russia for the aid rendered on a regular basis.

Later the delegation of the Working Group visited the Ministry of Education of the Syrian Arab Republic and met with Minister Hazwan al-Wazz. The participants in the meeting exchanged opinions on further cooperation in promoting the projects aimed at restoring the social infrastructure in Syria. The Minister emphasized that before the war there had been over twenty-two thousand general education schools in Syria. Today approximately half of them require restoration.

That same day the delegation members visited the residence of the Primate of the Syrian Orthodox Church and met with His Holiness Mor Ignatius Aphrem II.

*DECR Communication Service*