Representatives of religious communities of Syria and Russia meet in Damascus



On 3 February 2018, a delegation of the Working Group for Rendering Aid to the People of Syria of Russia's Presidential Council for Cooperation with Religious Organizations began its visit to Syria and Lebanon, which will be completed on February 9. The delegation will visit Damascus, the Beqaa Valley in Lebanon, and Beirut. The members of the working group will distribute the humanitarian aid and meet with representatives of the local religious communities, as well as with the population affected by the armed conflict, refugees and the leadership of the two countries.

With the blessing of His Holiness Patriarch Kirill of Moscow and All Russia and by the decision of Metropolitan Hilarion of Volokolamsk, chairman of the Moscow Patriarchate's Department for External Church Relations, Hieromonk Stefan (Igumnov), DECR secretary for inter-Christian relations, led the delegation. The delegation also includes Mr. Sergei Melnikov, secretary of Russia's Presidential Domestic Policy Directorate, executive secretary of the Presidential Council for Cooperation with Religious Organizations; Imam Muhtasib Ildar Ziganshin of the Tumen Region, member of the Presidium of the Central Muslim Spiritual Board of Russia; Mufti Albir Krganov, chairman of the Spiritual

Assembly of Muslims of Russia; Mr. Akhmad Kakhayev, first deputy chairman of the Central Muslim Spiritual Board of the Republic of Dagestan; Mr. Sergei Ryakhovsky, senior bishop of the Associated Russian Union of Christians of Evangelical Faith; Archimandrite Poghos Vardanyan, vicar of the head of the Russian and New Nakhichevan diocese of the Armenian Apostolic Church; Hieromonk Yermogen (Korchukov), executive director of the Interreligious Foundation for Assistance in Implementation of Joint Humanitarian Projects, steward of the Zaikonospassky Monastery in Moscow; Mr. Sergei Baydakov, head of the Moscow Office of the Imperial Orthodox Palestine Society; Ms Nelli Kuskova, co-chair of the Committee for Solidarity with the Peoples of Libya and Syria; Imam M. Mirsayapov, head of the International Department of the Spiritual Assembly of Muslims of Russia; Mr. A. Tashtimirov, member of the Central Muslim Spiritual Board of Russia; Mr. Oleg Fomin, co-chair of the Committee for Solidarity with the Peoples of Libya and Syria; Mr. Hassan Nasralla, chairman of the Arab Diaspora Regional Non-Governmental Organization; and representatives of the Russian TV channels and news agencies.

It is for the first time since the beginning of the Syrian crisis that such representative inter-faith delegation visits the country within the framework of a large-scale humanitarian project.

On February 3, upon their arrival in Damascus, the members of the delegation met with representatives of the Syrian religious communities. Taking part in the meeting were Sheikh Ahmad Samir al-Kabbani, Director General of Awqaf in the city of Damascus; Archimandrite Alexis (Chehadeh), head of the Charity Department of the Orthodox Church of Antioch; Bishop Armash Nalbandyan, head of the diocese of Damascus of the Armenian Apostolic Church; as well as representatives of the Syrian Orthodox, Maronite, Melkite, Armenian Catholic and Syrian Catholic Churches, and leaders of the Sunni, Shia, Ismaelite, Druze and Alawite communities of Syria.

Opening the meeting, Sheikh Ahmad Kabbani told those present about the visit of a delegation of the Syrian Muslim religious leaders, led by Dr. Mohammed Abdul Sattar al-Sayeed, Minister of Awqaf of the Syrian Arab Republic, to Russia in 2017 and about their meeting with His Holiness Patriarch Kirill of Moscow and All Russia. The Director General of Awqaf in the city of Damascus also noted that the Syrian people were grateful to Russia for its efforts aimed at liberating Syria from terrorists and at stimulating the process of full-scale national dialogue in the country. As Sheikh Kabbani emphasized, almost all the Syrian religious leaders present at the meeting had taken part in the Syrian People’s Congress held in Sochi. According to him, that meeting was of great significance for all Syrians.

In his address, Hieromonk Stefan (Igumnov) noted that representatives of various religious communities of Russia had come to Damascus to express solidarity with the Syrian people on behalf of all Russian people and to deliver the humanitarian aid collected by the Russian faithful. Father Stefan who had attended the Syrian People’s Congress in Sochi as an observer of the Russian Orthodox Church,

emphasized that the fraternal ties between the peoples of Russia and Syria, cemented by the centuries of friendship and by the blood, shed in the joint fight against terrorism, is now to be manifested in the deeds of mercy and in concerted efforts aimed at restoring peaceful life in Syria and in the entire Middle East.

After the meeting, a reception was given on behalf of the Ministry of Awqaf of the Syrian Arab Republic.

On February 4, the inter-religious delegation from Russia, with the participation of the leaders of local religious communities, will carry out a humanitarian action, unprecedented in its scale, to distribute the aid among the Syrian population affected by the hostilities in the country.

DECR Communication Service

Photo by Mikhail Voskresensky, RIA Novosti

Source: https://mospat.ru/en/news/47733/