



## **Delegation of Russian Orthodox Church takes part in interreligious conference in Baku**

On 21 December 2017, an international forum entitled “2017 – Year of Islamic Solidarity: Interreligious and Intercultural Dialogue” took place in the capital of Azerbaijan. The meeting was organized by the Caucasus Muslims Board with the assistance of the authorities of Azerbaijan.

The conference concluded the Year of Islamic Solidarity in Azerbaijan. Within its framework, well-attended international forums were held in different countries. For instance, meetings took place in St. Petersburg, Tashkent, and Madrid.

Taking part in the conference in Baku were representatives of religious communities, statesmen, public figures, diplomats and scholars from dozens of countries. With the blessing of His Holiness Patriarch Kirill of Moscow and All Russia, Metropolitan Lev of Novgorod and Staraya Russa led a delegation of the Moscow Patriarchate. Representing the Russian Orthodox Church were also Metropolitan Luka of Zaporozhye and Melitopol; Archbishop Alexander of Baku and Azerbaijan; Bishop Serafim of Bobruysk and Bykhov; Archpriest Nikolai Danilevich, vice-chairman of the Department for External Church Relations of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church; Archpriest Mefody Efendiyev, secretary of the Baku diocesan administration; and Mr. Iliya Kashytsyn, staff member of the Department for External Church Relations of the Moscow Patriarchate. The meeting was also attended by Metropolitan Emmanuel of France (Patriarchate of Constantinople) and Metropolitan Theodor of Akhaltsikhe and Tao-Klarjeti (Georgian Orthodox Church).

Taking part in the forum were His Holiness Patriarch Mor Ignatius Aphrem II of Antioch and All the East (Syrian Orthodox Church) and Patriarch Béchara Boutros Raï of the Maronite Church. Among those in attendance were also representatives of the Jewish and Buddhist organizations.

The opening ceremony of the forum was held at the Heydar Aliyev Centre in Baku. The President of the Republic of Azerbaijan, Mr. Ilham Aliyev, greeted the participants in the meeting. Metropolitan Lev of Novgorod and Staraya Russa read out a message of greetings from His Holiness Patriarch Kirill of Moscow and All Russia. Metropolitan Emmanuel of France greeted all those present on behalf of His Holiness Patriarch Bartholomew of Constantinople. A message of greetings from His Holiness and Beatitude Catholicos-Patriarch Iliya II of All Georgia was read out by Metropolitan Theodor of Akhaltsikhe and Tao-Klarjeti.

Among those who delivered presentations during the conference were Mr. M. Gurbanli, chairman of the State Committee for Work with Religious Associations of Azerbaijan; Mr. Ali Al-Hashim, advisor for religious affairs to the President of the United Arab Emirates; Mr. Taufiq Al-Sudairy, first deputy minister for religious affairs of the Saudi Arabia; Mufti Ismail Berdiyev, chairman of the Coordinating Centre for the Muslims of the North Caucasus; Grand Mufti of Egypt Shawki Allam; Mufti Usmonkhon Alimov, chairman of the Muslims Board of Uzbekistan; Bishop Thomas Schirrmacher, executive chairman of the World Evangelical Alliance; Mr. Mark Schneier, president of the Foundation for Ethnic Understanding; Mufti Ravil Pancheyev, chairman of the Muslims Board of St. Petersburg; Mufti Kamil Samigullin, chairman of the Muslims Board of Tatarstan; and Mr. Damir Mukhetdinov, first deputy chairman of the Muslims Board of the Russian Federation.

At the conclusion of the conference, a declaration was adopted, in which the participants confirmed their commitment to the peacemaking dialogue between religions and peoples, denounced extremism, and called for the just settlement of conflicts.

Later Sheikh ul-Islam Allahshükür Pashazade gave a reception in honour of the guests of the forum.

*DECR Communication Service*

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