First session of Commission for Dialogue between Russian Orthodox Church and Syriac Orthodox Church



December 7-10, 2017 – The Commission for Dialogue between the Russian Orthodox Church and the Syriac Orthodox Church held its first session in Cherepovets, Vologda region.

The agreement to establish this commission had been reached by His Holiness Kirill, Patriarch of Moscow and All Russia and His Holiness Patriarch Mor Ignatius Aphrem II, Patriarch of Antioch and all the East and Supreme Head of the Universal Syriac Orthodox Church, during the visit made by the Primate of the Syriac Orthodox Church to Russia from November 9 to 13, 2015. On May 11, 2017, the joint working group for preparing the dialogue met in Washington. On July 29, the membership of the commission was approved by the Holy Synod of the Russian Orthodox Church and in October of the same year, and an analogous decision was made by the Synod of the Syriac Orthodox Church.

The Moscow Patriarchate membership of the commission includes Bishop Flavian of Cherepovets and Belozersk as co-chairman; Hegumen Arseny (Sokolov), representative of the Patriarch of Moscow and all Russia to the Greek Orthodox Patriarch of Antioch and all the East; Hieromonk Stefan (Igumnov), secretary for inter-Christian affairs, Department for External Church Relations of Moscow Patriarchate (DECR); Mr. Sergey Alferov and Mr. Evgeny Bakhtin, DECR staff members.

The Syriac Orthodox Church's members of commission are: Archbishop Mor Dionysios Issa Gurbuz, patriarchal vicar in Switzerland and Austria as co-chairman; Archimandrite Raban Jak Yakoub, director

of the Patriarchal Youth Department; Archimandrite Roger-Youssef Akhrass, director of the Department of Syriac Studies; Deacon Imad Syryany, staff member of the patriarchal secretariat; Mr. Shadi Sarweh, executive director of St. Ephrem Patriarchal Development Committee (EPDC).

The commission defined the following priorities for the work in the nearest future: cooperation in humanitarian, informational, cultural and academic areas and studies on monastic traditions and church social service.

It was stated that the bilateral dialogue between the Moscow Patriarchate and the Syriac Orthodox Church is launched in a situation when Syria and her population are still experiencing the hardest consequences of the bloody military conflict and terrorist violence. Among its victims are Christians including those who belong to the Syriac Orthodox Church who have lived in that biblical from of old. The parties resolutely condemned any forms of terrorism and extremism which does not have any ethnic, national or religious but only evil identity. The participants in the meeting expressed profound condolences to all the people in Syria who lost their relatives and friends in the recent years, and to the families of Russian officers and soldiers who fell defending the sovereignty and inalienable right to the peaceful life of the people of the Syrian Arab Republic, including the victims of the Russian Defence Ministry plane crash over the Black Sea on December 25, 2016.

Expressing hope for a speedy revival of peaceful life in Syria, the commission pointed to the special value of the experience of peaceful co-existence in that country, just as in Russia, between people of different ethnic backgrounds and religious communities. In this connection, the Syriac Orthodox side, noting the important role of the Russian state leadership and primarily that of the civil society including the Russian Orthodox Church, expressed the wish to establish in the nearest future regular contacts with the working group for rendering aid to the Syrian population of Russia’s Presidential Council for Cooperation with Religious Organizations.

The commission considered prospects for organizing inter-church student exchange and development of other forms of cooperation in the academic and youth spheres. It is important, the commission noted, that representatives of the Syriac Orthodox Church should take part in academic theological conferences held by the Ss Cyril and Methodius Institute of Post-Graduate Studies. The Syriac Orthodox side also plans to invite theologians from the Russian Orthodox Church to their academic forums held also in their dioceses in other countries.

The commission outlined possible steps to be taken for coordinating the bilateral cooperation in the sphere of media.

The commission has elected its secretaries: S. G. Alferov from the Russian Orthodox Church and

Deacon Imad Syryany from the Syriac Orthodox Church.

In conclusion of its session, the commission adopted a joint memorandum. The results of the meeting will be reported the Holy Synods of the Russian Orthodox Church and the Syriac Orthodox Church.

On December 9, the commemoration day of Ss Athanasius and Theodosius, the heavenly patrons of Cherepovets, the commission members worshipped at the solemn Liturgy celebrated at the cathedral dedicated to these saints. The service was presided over by Bishop Flavian and Bishop Tarasiy of Velukiy Ustyug and Totma.

In the evening of the same day the participants in the session attended the concert given at the Chamber Theatre in Cherepovets. Before the beginning of the musical performance, Bishop Flavian, Cherepovets Mayor M. Gusev, Hegumen Arseniy and Archimandrite Jak Yakoub addressed the audience.

The program of the meeting also included visits to the city Museum of Arts, FosAgro Company and several local churches. During their short stay in Moscow, the Syriac Orthodox delegation visited the Russian Icon Museum and made a tour of the historical center of the capital city including Red Square and Zaryadie landscape urban park.

The next session of the commission will take place in 2018 in the territory of the Syriac Orthodox Church.

DECR Communication Service

Source: https://mospat.ru/en/news/47862/