Round-table conference in Rabat on Co-work of Russian Orthodox Church and Compatriots in Africa and South-West Asia



November 16, 2017 – A round-table conference on Russian Orthodox Church and Compatriots: Experience of Co-work in Africa and South-West Asia took place at the Russian Federation embassy in the Kingdom of Morocco. It was organized by the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Moscow Patriarchate department for external church relations (DECR) with the support of the Russian World foundation.

Round tables on cooperation between the Russian Orthodox Church and compatriots have been held for eight years now, bringing together clergy and representatives of organizations of compatriots from various world regions. Earlier such meetings took place in Brussels, Buenos Aires, Beijing, San Francisco, Johannesburg and Berlin.

With the blessing of His Holiness Patriarch Kirill of Moscow and All Russia, a delegation of the Russian Orthodox Church arrived in Morocco. It was led by Metropolitan Hilarion of Volokolamsk, head of the Moscow Patriarchate department for external church relations (DECR).

At Casablanca Mohammed V airport His Eminence Hilarion was met by Russian ambassador to Morocco V. Vorobyev.

The delegation included Bishop Antoniy of Zvenigorod, head of the Moscow Patriarchate office for institutions abroad, Archimandrite Philaret (Bulekov), DECR vice-chairman, Archpriest Sergiy Zvonarev, DECR secretary for the far abroad, Deacon Sergiy Kalashnikov, Moscow Patriarchate office for the institution abroad, and A. Yershov, an assistant to the DECR chairman.

Clergy and representatives of compatriots' associations came for the round table from Egypt, Israel, Iran, Lebanon, Morocco, Namibia, South Africa, Tunisia, and United Arab Emirates.

Before the beginning of the meeting Bishop Antoniy conducted a prayer for the beginning of every good task at the church of the Holy Resurrection in Rabat.

The round table began its work at the Russian embassy in Morocco. The gathering was addressed by the head of the diplomatic mission in Morocco, V. Vorobyev.

Opening the meeting, its moderator Metropolitan Hilarion greeted those present on behalf of the Primate of the Russian Orthodox Church, His Holiness Patriarch Kirill of Moscow and All Russia. He dwelt on the topic of the centenary of the revolutionary events in Russia, which radically changed the foundations of the state order and social development and became the cause for a deep schism in society. For the Russian Orthodox Church these tragic events made a beginning of the period of persecution during which an assembly of new martyrs and confessors was revealed.

In his remarks Metropolitan Hilarion focused on the problem of persecution against Christians in the Middle East and North Africa. He drew the attention of the gathering to the danger of de-Christianization of the lands of historical abode of believers in Christ, the need for consistent struggle with extremism and terrorism and for joint efforts of all the parties concerned for restoring churches, civilians' homes and infrastructure in Syria.

His Eminence also touched upon the problem of discrimination against the Ukrainian Orthodox Church and informed the meeting about facts of captures of its churches in raids and attempts to supply this destructive activity with normative grounds.

The DECR chairman reminded the gathering that this year marks the 950th anniversary of the martyrdom of Ss Peter and Paul the First Apostles. He wished the pastors present the at the round table, who serve in various parts of Africa and South-West Asia, the apostolic zeal in preaching the word

of God and asserting moral ideals in people's life and called upon them to take part in the public discussion in their countries, bearing witness to traditional values.

In his speech of greetings, Bishop Antoniy pointed to the importance of such meetings as they enable pastors to share their experience of involvement in compatriots' life and to strengthen interaction with diplomatic missions and cultural centers.

Speeches were also made by Archimandrite Alexander (Zarkeshev), rector of the church of St. Philip in Ash Shāriqah, United Arab Emirates; A. Lanchikov, deputy director of the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs department for compatriots living abroad; Hegumen Arseniy (Sokolov), representative of the Patriarch of Moscow and All Russia to the Patriarch of Antioch and All the East; Father Victor Kulaga, representative of the Patriarch of Moscow and All Russian to the Patriarch of Alexandria and All Africa; Archpriest Anthony Ilyin, adviser to chairman of the board of director of the Russian World foundation; V. Chechin, head of the Morocco representation of Rossorudnichestvo; Hieromonk Dometian (Markarian), deputy head of the Russian Ecclesiastical Mission in Jerusalem; Archpriest Dimitry Netsvetaev, rector of the church of the Holy Prince Alexander Nevsky in Tunis; Archpriest Daniel Lugovoy rector of the church of St. Sergius of Radonezh in Johannesburg, South Africa; Ms. Diana Kemp, organizer of Orthodox divine services in Windhoek and member of the Russian-speaking community in Namibia, and others.

In an atmosphere of constructive dialogue, participants considered issues concerning the support of the Russian-speaking diaspora in African and Asian regions, shared their experience of pastoral care for compatriots and considered problems involved in the work of Sunday schools and Russian language schools.

In conclusion of the event, Ambassador Vorobyev gave a reception.

DECR Communication Service

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