



## **Russian Orthodox Church delegation attends interreligious forum in Baku**

15 March 2017 – An international conference on ‘Islamic Solidarity – A Challenge of Time’ took place in Baku, Azerbaijan. It was organized jointly by the Caucasus Moslem Board, the State Committee for Work with Religious Entities, the National Academy of Science of Azerbaijan, and the Baku International Center of Multi-Culturalism.

With the blessing of His Holiness Patriarch Kirill of Moscow and All Russia, the forum was attended by Metropolitan Lev of Novgorod and Staraya Russa. The Moscow Patriarchate department for external church relations (DECR) was represented, with the blessing of its head, Metropolitan Hilarion of Volokolamsk, by Archimandrite Philaret (Bulekov), a DECR vice-chairman, and the Rev. Dimitry Safonov, DECR secretary for interreligious relations.

The forum was moderated by Sheikh ul-Islam Allahshouqur Pasha-zade, chairman of the Caucasus Moslem Board. In his introductory remarks he stressed, ‘The endless wave of terror, mass murder of people, destruction of religious and cultural monuments in various parts of the world, including the Middle East – Syria, Palestine, Iraq, Turkey, are common human tragedies’. He also noted that

'humanity can be saved from these threats only through uniting its efforts on the basis of solidarity and interreligious cooperation'.

Mr. Kyamal Abdillov, Azerbaijan state councilor for international issues, multi-culturalism and religion, read out a message of greetings from President Aliyev.

In his address to the forum, Metropolitan Lev conveyed greetings from Patriarch Kirill of Moscow and All Russia. He spoke about the importance of interreligious dialogue in the efforts to reach mutual understanding and concerted positions on ethical and social issues. Among the speakers was also Archbishop Alexander of Baku and Azerbaijan. In his speech, Archimandrite Philaret pointed to the importance of consolidation of religious communities in face of the challenges of extremism and terrorism. He also outlined the main areas to be dealt with in the ROC's dialogue with Muslim communities, including in the Interreligious Council in Russia.

Among the attendees was also a delegation of the Georgian Orthodox Church led by Bishop Dimitry of Khornabudzhi and Ereti. Protopresbyter George Zviadadze brought a message of greetings from His Holiness and Beatitude Iliya II, Catholicos-Patriarch of All Georgia.

There were also state officials, diplomats, scholars, leaders and representatives of traditional religious communities in Azerbaijan and other countries. Among the speakers were Academician Akif Alizade, president of the Azerbaijan National Academy of Sciences, Mr. Mubariz Gurbanly, chairman of the Azerbaijan State Committee for Work with Religious Communities, Mr. Abulfas Garaev, minister of culture and tourism, Mr. Khalaf Khalafov, deputy foreign minister, Mr. Mahmud Erol Kylych, general secretary of the Parliamentary Union of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation, Mr. Manouchehr Motakki, former minister of foreign affairs of Iran, Ms. Gunai Efendieva, president of the Turkic Culture and Heritage Foundation, Mr. Bahrom Abdukhalimov, vice-president of the Uzbekistan Academy of Sciences, and other Islamic dignitaries.

In conclusion the forum adopted a message to the world public, in which many acts of violence committed under the cover of religion are condemned. The document gives a high value to the contribution made by Patriarch Kirill of Moscow and All Russia to the cause of peace in the region.

*DECR Communication Service*