Round table meeting marking the 20th anniversary of the Church and International Relations Centre takes place in Moscow Institute of International Relations

On 7 December 2016, a round table meeting marking the 20th anniversary of the establishment of the Church and International Relations Centre was held at the Moscow State Institute of International Relations (MGIMO). Prior to the meeting, a prayer service was celebrated at the MGIMO Church of the Holy Right-Believing Prince Alexander Nevsky.

Among those who spoke at the meeting were Prof. Anatoly Torkunov, rector of the MGIMO University, and Metropolitan Hilarion of Volokolamsk, chairman of the Moscow Patriarchate's Department for External Church Relations, rector of Ss. Cyril and Methodius Theological Institute of Postgraduate Studies.

Mr. Vladimir Legoyda, chairman of the Department for Church-Society and Media Relations, director of the Church and International Relations Centre, acted as moderator of the round table discussion.

The participants in the meeting heard reports from archpriest Nikolai Balashov, DECR vice-chairman; Mr. Konstantin Dolgov, Russian Foreign Ministry Commissioner for Human Rights, Democracy and the Rule of Law; and Mr. Yaroslav Skvortsov, dean of the MGIMO Faculty of International Journalism.

As archpriest Nikolai Balashov noted in his address, "the recent decades have clearly shown that religion as a factor of international relations has not paled into insignificance, but instead has risen in importance. It has become particularly evident in the context of rise in international terrorism that often takes advantage of people's religious feelings and acts under the guise of religious slogans."

"It is absolutely clear that the only way one can oppose this destructive phenomenon is by relying on the potential of the world traditional religions and their leaders," the DECR vice-chairman continued and reminded the participants in the meeting that the "Arab Spring" in the Middle East had resulted not in the democratization of society, but instead in the collapse of the states and the outbreak of crime.

"Christians were among the first victims," Father Nikolai Balashov added, "The tragic developments in the Middle East were the reason for their mass exodus from their native lands. For instance, in Iraq the number of Christians has decreased by ten times for the past thirteen years – from 1.5 million people to one hundred fifty thousand. As for Syria, the Christian population there has decreased twice at least –

from two million people to one million. In Libya there are almost no living representatives of the Christian tradition left."

According to the DECR vice-chairman, the problem of persecution of Christians has been widely acknowledged at the international level thanks to, first of all, the concerted efforts of the Russian Orthodox Church and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation. He also reminded all those present that it was one of the central topics of the Joint Declaration signed by Patriarch Kirill of Moscow and All Russia and Pope Francis in Havana this February.

In his address, Mr. Konstantin Dolgov emphasized that the Russian Orthodox Church and the state had all they needed to promote effective cooperation that had acquired particular importance over the past few years.

According to Mr. Dolgov, the effective concerted actions of states and civil society are required to defend Christians in the Middle East.

The participants in the meeting also focused on the history of relationships between the Church and the Russian diplomats and exchanged their opinions on the religious dimension of foreign policy and on the issue of upholding traditional values, common for many nations belonging to the Christian civilization.

The 20th anniversary of the Church and International Relations Centre was also one of the major topics of the meeting. As archpriest Nikolai Balashov noted, the Centre has made its considerable contribution to the promotion of cooperation between the Russian Orthodox Church and the secular science.

"The establishment of the Centre was the starting point for raising a whole generation of diplomats, specialized in international relations, who are able to regard the Church as their partner.., as an inspirational force," he said.

Prof. Alexei Shestopal, head of the MGIMO Chair of Philosophy and one of the founders of the Church and International Relations Centre, noted that Patriarch Kirill of Moscow and All Russia, while heading the Department for External Church Relations, had taken part in many meetings with diplomats, inspiring them to serve their homeland at a time of challenges for the Russian foreign policy.

DECR Communication Service

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