



9th meeting of Joint Russian-Iranian Commission for Orthodoxy-Islam Dialogue takes place in Tehran



On 25-26 August 2014, the 9th meeting of the Joint Russian-Iranian Commission for Orthodoxy-Islam Dialogue took place in the capital of Iran. This year, the meeting was dedicated to the theme “Importance and Strengthening of Cooperation and Mutual Understanding between Islam and Orthodoxy.”

The delegation of the Russian Orthodox Church included Archbishop Feofilakt of Pyatigorsk and Cherkessk; archpriest Vladislav Tsylin, professor of the Moscow Theological Academy; Archimandrite Alexander (Zarkeshev), rector of St Nicholas Cathedral in Tehran; archpriest Sergiy Zvonarev, secretary for far abroad countries of the Department for External Church Relations; Rev. Dimitry Safonov, head of the DECR sector for interreligious contacts; Ms. Elena Dunaeva, senior researcher at the Institute of Oriental Studies of the Russian Academy of Sciences.

The session opened in a conference-hall of the Islamic Culture and Relations Organization of Iran. Its head, Dr. Abouzar Ebrahimi, warmly greeted the church delegation and delivered an opening address.

Archbishop Feofilakt read out His Holiness Patriarch Kirill's greeting to the participants in the meeting and delivered a report "On Witness of Faith and Subject-Matter of Interfaith Dialogue."

Mr. Ali Younesi, adviser to the Iranian President on religious minorities, told those present about the policy of the Iranian state in regard to religious minorities.

In his address, Ayatollah Mohammad Ali Taskhiri, who had stood at the origins of the Orthodoxy-Islam Dialogue, emphasized that combined efforts were needed to overcome extremism and violence.

At the conclusion of the first part of the forum, Archbishop Feofilakt thanked the Iranian side for the warm and cordial welcome and wished the sessions to continue in the same spirit of mutual understanding, characteristic of such meetings.

The first section was called "Religious Extremism and Ways to Oppose It."

Opening the session, Hojat-ol-Islam Dr. Seyyed Javad Beheshti described the position of the Iranian theologians on the origins of extremism which uses religion as a cover.

In his address, Rev. Dimitry Safonov focused on the problem of extremism under religious slogans. He briefly introduced the participants in the session to addresses and official statements of the supreme authority of the Russian Orthodox Church on this issue and shared the results of the research on activities of extremist groups in Syria and Iraq.

Archbishop Feofilakt acted as a moderator of the section "Veneration of Martyrs in Islam and Christianity". During the section, archpriest Vladislav Tsybin delivered a report "On Feat and Veneration of Martyrs in the Russian Orthodox Church."

In his address, the former head of the Islamic Culture and Relations Organization of Iran, Mr. Mohammadi Iraqi, told about the veneration of martyrs for faith in Islam.

The next section summarized the results of eight previous rounds of the dialogue which began in 1997. Archimandrite Alexander (Zarkeshev) told those present about the history of Orthodoxy in Iran

and made an evaluation of all eight meetings in which he had taken part. In her report “Orthodoxy-Islam – The Way to Strengthen Trust and Broaden Cooperation between Russia and Iran”, Ms. Elena Dunaeva spoke about the role of the Commission for the development of intercultural and interstate relations between the people of the two countries.

Mr. Mohammad Masjed Jamei, senior consultant at the University of Religions in Qom, told the participants in the meeting about the academic tradition of studying Orthodoxy at the Iranian theological schools.

On 25 August 2014, the church delegation met with representatives of Christian communities of Iran, invited to the forum. The meeting took place on the initiative of the delegation of the Russian Orthodox Church. Among its participants were Archbishop Mar Narsai Benyamin, head of the Diocese of Iran of the Assyrian Church of the East, as well as clergymen representing the Armenian Church (Catholicosate of Cilicia), the Assyrian Presbyterian Church and other Christian communities. During the meeting, Christians from Iran told about their life in that country. Archbishop Feofilakt warmly greeted them and told them about the efforts of the Russian Orthodox Church to help Christians in the Middle East.

The section “Religious Minorities and Necessity of Peaceful Coexistence in the World” opened the second day of the forum. Rev. Dimitry Safonov acted as a moderator of that section.

During the section, archpriest Sergiy Zvonarev delivered a report on Modern Peacemaking Mission of the Russian Orthodox Church in the Middle East.

Mr. Seyed Abolhasan Navvab, rector of the University of Religions and Denominations, presented his views on the topic of the section. Ayatollah Hadavi Tehrani delivered a report on extremism under religious slogans.

The participants in the section noted the similarity of their positions concerning the overcoming of extremism and decided to continue their joint work on this issue.

A final communiqué was adopted at the concluding session.

The forum aroused interest among the Iranian mass media. Attending the sessions were dozens of the Iranian scholars specializing in religious studies, as well as post-graduate students and students of the universities of Iran.