



Patriarch Kirill takes part in the CIS Interreligious Council's presidium meeting

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The presidium of the Interreligious Council in the Commonwealth of the Independent States met on November 28, 2011, in Yerevan, Armenia.

The meeting was attended by Patriarch Kirill of Moscow and All Russia, Sheikh-ul-Islam Allahshuqur Pasha-zade, head of the Caucasus Moslem Board; Supreme Patriarch and Catholicos Karekin II of All Armenians, Metropolitan Vladimir of Kishinev and All Moldova, Metropolitan Alexander of Astana and Kazakhstan, Metropolitan Vikenty of Tashkent and Uzbekistan, Archbishop Alexander of Pereyaslav-Khmelnitsky, Mr. A. Boroda, president of the Federation of Jewish Communities in Russia, Russia's Chief Rabbi A. Shaevich, Ukraine's Chief Rabbi Yaakov Dov Bleich, Did Khambo Lama Dagba Ochirov, deputy head of the Buddhist Traditional Sangha in Russia; Sanjei Lama, permanent representative of the head of the Buddhists Sangha in Russia; Mufti Absattar Derbisaliev, head of the Kazakhstan Muslim Board; Saidmulin Murodov, representative of the head of the Tajikistan Muslim Board; Supreme Mufti Talgat Tadjuddin, head of the Central Muslim Board in Russia; Mufti-Sheikh Ravil Gainutdin, head of the Council of Muftis in Russia; Shafiq Pshikhachev, president of the International Islamic Mission; Archpriest Vsevolod Chaplin, head of the Synodal Department for Church-Society Relations, and Archpriest George Roschi, deputy head of the Synodal Department for Church-Society Relations.

Among the guests of the meeting were Bishop Alexander of Baku and Azerbaijan; Sabir Gasanli, deputy head of the Caucasus Muslim Board; Rashad Aliyarly, deputy head of the Caucasus Muslim Board; Mufti Ildus Faizov, head of the Tatarstan Muslim Board; Rishat Khamidullin, head of the propaganda and information department of the Tatarstan Muslim Board; Mufti Tagir Samatov, first deputy head of the Central Muslim Board in Russia; Soleijon Zavkiev, head of Tajikistan's State Committee for Religions; Adriano Roccucci, general secretary of the Community of St. Egidio; Nurjan Makhanov, head of the international department of the Kazakhstan Muslim Board, Rabbi Z. Cogan, vice-president of the Congress of Jewish Religious Organizations and Associations in Russia.

The meeting was also attended by Armenia's President Serj Sargsyan.

The meeting was opened by Patriarch Kirill. He said in his introductory remarks that cooperation between representatives of traditional religions in the CIS was successfully developing on the platform of the Interreligious Council and in bilateral contacts. "It can be stated that we are like-minded people on

a whole number of issues, including ones on whose solution the fate of the human race depends. I mean problems of human spiritual and moral life. And here the role of traditional religions, to which we belong, is especially high. Preservation of moral foundations of life is not a priority in the social development today. Take any political program and you will see that the problems of human ethical life are either present in it implicitly or given a very small room. People's conscience is directed in the first place towards successes in economy and solution of political problems. But the inner life of the individual remains outside the sphere of special attention both in political and public organizations. It is religion that poses problems of morality as a main theme in its ministry and witness. Traditional religions are institutes called to preserve moral principles. And conflicts, which arise in the sphere of inter-personal, inter-community, inter-ethnic and inter-state relations, cannot but disturb people of traditional religions. Indeed, underlying any conflict is destruction of the moral foundation, a certain moral corrosion", he said.

Patriarch Kirill described the meeting of the CIS Interreligious Council in Yerevan as a symbolic event and thanked the Supreme Patriarch and Catholicos Karekin II for the invitation to come to Armenia. He also thanked the Armenian president for his assistance in organizing the meeting.

Then Patriarch and Catholicos Karekin II took the floor. The head of the Armenian Apostolic Church reminded the meeting of the challenges facing the present-day world, saying, "In the situation of globalization accompanied with economic, scientific and cultural achievements, we are deeply concerned for the continued violence and wars, the economic and financial crisis, which has not been overcome yet, and social and political disturbances in North Africa and the Middle East.

"We have gathered together today in order to find ways of solving the problems that disturb our peoples. Regrettably, there is still a great deal of urgent problems which are consequences of confrontations which need to be resolved. Among them is the problem of Karabakh. We are glad that concurrent with the meeting of the CIS Interreligious Council's presidium, trilateral meetings of religious leaders of the Caucasus region are held. With profound respect for one another, with brotherly love commanded and given by the Almighty, we seek to promote a settlement of the problems existing in relations between our peoples, to strengthen the spirit of mutual understanding and good will, to make the dialogue productive. It is our conviction that there is no alternative to peace and that the confrontation and problems should find a solution in the process of peaceful negotiations through the protection of fundamental human rights and observance of international law".

In his address to the meeting, Armenian President Serj Sargsyan said that the summit in Yerevan was a testimony to the fact that the only right way of solving problems in today's worlds is the joining of efforts in face of common challenges and the consolidation of people's solidarity irrespective of their ethnic origin or religious beliefs. He underscored that 'today the world needs peace not strife. In these efforts it

is necessary not to humiliate or subject others but to encourage and strengthen people's spiritual aspirations which generate love, kindness, respect, tolerance toward each other and to promote the establishment of peace and accord'.

Speaking about the Karabakh problem, which the Armenian president described as 'our great pain', he noted that the only way of settling the problem was a process of peaceful settlement.

The head of the Armenian state welcomed the dialogue between the Patriarch and Catholicos Karekin II and Sheikh-ul-Islam Allahshuqur Pasha-zade with the mediation of Patriarch Kirill of Moscow and All Russia, saying, 'I thank you for the efforts which help to resolve this conflict'.

Russian Ambassador to Armenia V. Kovalenko read out a message from Russian President Dmitry Medvedev, who stated in particular, 'Your cooperation is based on respect for common human values and principles of tolerance and the traditions of good-neighbourly relations and cooperation which have been historically accumulated in the CIS. This common work is necessary for the spiritual and moral education of the younger generation, for solving urgent social problems, for opposing extremism and terrorism and for maintaining international accord in the name of peace and progress in our countries. I am confident that the present meeting of the Presidium will contribute to these aims'.

Patriarch Kirill, in his address to the meeting, said:

"Our today's meeting is of great importance because we meet at a special time. Important events are taking place in the vast lands of the CIS. We are witnesses to very complicated processes which are taking place in the Middle East and North Africa, and every one of us certainly pays attention to what is happening today to the modern man, to what is happening today in the life of our people.

"I am sincerely delighted at the atmosphere of friendship with which we have been surrounded in Yerevan. But to our great sorrow, the good relations between religious leaders only underscore the loneliness and disunity of many people in today's world, especially those who are formally or actually deprived of faith. On one hand, for many, even non-believers, it is clear that the crisis of morality, the crisis of the personality has led to the degradation of public relations. But on the other hand, it is impossible to understand how it has happened, because the last century and the beginning of the present one have been marked indeed with the world-wide struggle for human rights and with revolutionary changes in such spheres as science, education, medicine, technology and in the industrial and social activity of people.

"Religious people do know: all these blessings, which are results of civilizational and technological progress, can be not only beneficial but also detrimental. It is a common truth. Faith united with

conscience makes a person capable of discerning good and evil and understanding where lie the bounds which are not to be overstepped. One of the greatest threats to the life of the modern man is that the notion of bounds is lost. Any bound can be overstepped; there are no restraining factors which could define human behaviour as normal apart from prescriptions of the secular law. But we know that it is in the depths of the human soul that human actions ripen to lead, among other things, to violations of public laws.

“The loss of faith and the corruption of conscience lead to grave consequences. A person who has a strong will but who has become a madman or a fanatic brings enormous evil both to himself and those around him. And we know of many examples of terrorism and other crimes which were committed by such ‘strong’ persons as well as organized groups.

“Another evil, which seems to be lesser but which is still lethal for the soul, is committed by a man who indulges in pleasure and lust. He may be well-meaning outwardly, but having no will or clear reason, such member of society becomes as if a black hole which swallows earthly blessings, sometimes questionable and giving nothing in return. So, we can see that a strong will just as an absence of will under certain circumstances can be the cause of many troubles.

“Today many say that it is necessary to unify cultures by not only creating a common economic space but also by rebuilding religious views and people’s traditions. To reject one’s own will, to abandon one’s faith and to betray one’s traditions – this is the way proposed today by some representatives of the ruling elites who threaten us with isolation from the progress with its material wealth and external public recognition.

“But none of the believers will accept such a proposal. There is an alternative to it, which are strong will, sincere faith and bright conscience forming together the foundation of personal and public morality. The resumption of this foundation can work a miracle in our world; it is capable of changing the human being for the better and together with it to change and heal many conflicts and illnesses of the modern civilization.

“We have come to the limit when it is necessary to firmly and resolutely state: It is only the moral assessment and moral self-assessment accompanying every meaningful action of politicians, teachers, journalists, medical doctors, scientists that can amend the situation. Every person should give attention to his or her spiritual condition. The whole society must think over its moral make-up. Traditional religions can and must give essential assistance in this process. To awaken conscience in people, to say firmly what is good and what is evil, to direct people to freedom from sin and to the observance of unchangeable moral ideals – this is the task for real religious leaders and for those who are committed to their faith and whose who bring this faith to the world.

“There are reasons to believe that the 21st century will not be easy and cloudless. There are many dangers and difficulties facing our peoples. All the attempts at social engineering have failed in face of the challenges of today. The only thing that the world without God is ready to offer to the modern man is the amputation of his soul in return for the promise of peace and security. But this promise is a lie. It is within our power to make a different decision which will make it possible to preserve the individuality of each person, the cultural distinctions of every nation and at the same time to overcome conflicts and reach harmony. It is the turning of the 21st century into a century of moral renewal. And on this path, people of traditional religions, responsible representatives who have behind them enormous communities, should join their efforts. Because, if not we then who? It is a special challenge hurled at religious leaders and to all the believing people by the present stage in the development of the human civilization.

“There are many problems worthy of discussion. Some of them arise as the world is globalized. Before, religions used to live in their own habitats, often within the limits of religiously homogeneous states. There used to be purely Orthodox, purely Catholic, purely Muslim, purely Buddhist states. Today the world is in motion, with people moving not only to visit particular countries as tourists but also to start a business, to work, to study and sometime to start a family. All this brings people of our religious communities into closer contacts. It used to be easier to maintain peace including interreligious peace when religions lived in their own habitat. But it is a much more complicated task to maintain interreligious peace when there is this diffusion, mutual penetration, life side by side.

“And here a great problem arises of course, which has to be solved including with the participation of traditional religions. This problem is linked with people’s migration. Religious communities should show special initiative for educating migrants to help them to adjust themselves to a new cultural milieu, to develop their consciousness towards cooperation and joint efforts, not self-isolation because any isolation amidst a majority can sooner or later end in confrontation. For this reason, it seems important for all of us to work with migrants. This work will help resettlers to preserve their faith, their own customs and traditions, on one hand, and to adapt to the local conditions of life, on the other.

“Today millions of Russians and Russian-speaking people live abroad in the CIS countries. The Russian Orthodox Church has also encountered this challenge in Western Europe, the USA, Latin America and even Asia and Australia. I am aware that the representatives of religious communities, who have gathered around this table, have also encountered similar problems both in the far and near abroad.

“We have gathered together at a time when there is unrest in the Middle East. I will not give a political assessment of the events taking place there but I am very much concerned over the humanitarian dimension of the developments. Many of us know from information sources what is happening in Egypt, Libya and Iraq. The most dreadful consequence of the developments is the destruction of interreligious

peace, gross violations of human rights and violence against religious minorities. And what happens in one place cannot but echoes with pain elsewhere.

“For this reason, it seems very important to me that we should have the courage to raise our voice in defence of those who are oppressed on religious grounds, in defence of minorities wherever they may live, because the risk they run at a time of political upheavals is very high. At this moment I think of course about Christian communities in Egypt and other Middle East countries, especially Iraq. Though I know that in some places people of other religions are also exposed to danger. I believe we should be in solidarity with all those who suffer.

“I would like once again to thank you, Your Holiness, for arranging this meeting, and you, dear brother, for active participation in the preparation of this event, and I thank all of you who have gathered here. I believe the Interreligious Council in the CIS is a vital, creative and responsible organization. May the Lord help us in fulfilling our duty”.

The head of the Muslim Board in the Caucasus, who spoke next, noted the importance of the meeting, saying, ‘I am confident that it will go down in history as an important event in the history of interreligious dialogue not only within the CIS but also on the international level’. He underscored the role of the CIS Interreligious Council in opposing the attempts to sow inter-ethnic and interreligious strife and recalled the peace efforts of the Council, saying, “Because the establishment of peace is so vitally important, we as religious leaders should seek to resolve all the conflict situations in the CIS only by peaceful means and to give all possible assistance in this to political leaders”.

He said that the grave consequences of the conflict in Nagorny Karabakh continued to lie like a heavy burden on the shoulders of the peoples in Azerbaijan and the efforts to resolve the problem by peaceful means should be continued on both regional and international levels.

After remarks made by other religious leaders in the CIS, the meeting adopted a communiqué.

The Interreligious Council in the Commonwealth of the Independent States is a public organization founded by traditional religious organizations in the CIS. The decision to establish it was made by the Second Interreligious Peace Forum of the CIS in March 2004.

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