



Awards of the International Foundation for the Unity of Orthodox Christian Nations are presented at the Cathedral of Christ the Saviour

On 21 January 2010, the 10th annual awarding ceremony of the International Foundation for the Unity of Orthodox Christian Nations (IFUOCN) took place in the Hall of Church Council in the Cathedral of Christ the Saviour. His Holiness Patriarch Kirill of Moscow and All Russia officiated at the ceremony of awarding the prize "For the outstanding activity on strengthening unity of Orthodox Christian Nations. For consolidation and promotion of Christian values in the life of society" named after His Holiness Patriarch Alexy II.

The prizes are awarded annually to the heads of states, governments, and parliaments, Primates of the Churches, and major public figures for their contribution to the strengthening of economic and political ties between the states, which have been formed in the context of Eastern Christian tradition, and for the consolidation of noble standards of Christian morals in the life of Christian community.

The IFUOCN-2009 prizewinners are Russian President Dmitry Medvedev, His Holiness the Supreme Patriarch and Catholics of All Armenians Karekin II, Serbian filmmaker Emir Kusturica, and St. Vladimir's Orthodox Theological Seminary (USA).

The Primate of the Russian Orthodox Church had a talk with the Russian President and His Holiness Patriarch and Catholic of All Armenians Karekin II at the Patriarchal chambers before the ceremony and greeted other prizewinners.

Attending the ceremony as guests were wife of the Russian President Svetlana Medvedeva; Presidential Plenipotentiary Envoy to the Central Federal District Georgy Poltavchenko; deputy chairman of the State Duma of the Federal Assembly of the Russian Federation Lyobov Slizka; Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov; Moscow Mayor Yury Luzhkov; president of the Chamber of Commerce and Industry of the Russian Federation Yevgeny Primakov; Hero of the Soviet Union, Hero of Russia, deputy of the State Duma of the Federal Assembly of the Russian Federation Artur Chilingarov; Ambassador of Armenia to Russia Armen Sambatian; president of the Union of Armenians in Russia Ara Abramian; and the filmmaker's wife Maja Kusturica.

Present in the Hall of Church Councils in the Cathedral of Christ the Saviour were Archbishop Hilarion, chairman of the Moscow Patriarchate Department for External Church Relations; Bishop Savva of

Krasnogorsk; Bishop Sergy of Solnechnogorsk; chairman of the Synodal Department for Church-Society relations archpriest Vsevolod Chaplin; and archimandrite Zaccaeus (Wood), representative of the Orthodox Church in America at the Patriarch of Moscow and All Russia.

The IFUOCN president professor Valery Alekseyev opened the ceremony. He noted in particular that 45 persons and organizations from 22 countries of the world have been awarded the prize for the last ten years.

"This year marks the 15th anniversary of the establishment of the International Foundation for the Unity of Orthodox Christian Nations," professor Alekseyev said, "We gratefully cherish the memory of His Holiness Patriarch Alexy II; our Foundation has been established and developed with his blessing and active participation."

His Holiness Patriarch Kirill of Moscow and All Russia, president of the IFUOCN Board of Trustees, underscored in his welcoming speech, "By means of their personal example, the importance of which can hardly be overestimated, the prize winners convincingly show that at all times all people can and should lead a worthy sacrificial life; to be faithful to spiritual values and historical roots of their people, and to render active service to the near and to the far thus fulfilling their Christian and human duty."

His Holiness noted in particular the efforts of the Russian President Dmitry Medvedev "aimed at the strengthening of the community of nations, including the nations adhering to the Orthodox Christian tradition. These efforts are extremely important in the context of arranging relations between the countries in the post-Soviet space bound by common history, one culture and – I am confident – common future." His Holiness also noted the importance of the work with compatriots that has been actively developed in the recent years, for instance, in certain state programmes.

"This position of the state authorities has not only given an opportunity to people who identify themselves with Russian culture to maintain spiritual unity and single values, but also an impetus to preserve the great Slavonic civilization, which can and must exist as a very important spiritual and cultural phenomenon enriching the entire world," His Holiness said.

While greeting His Holiness the Supreme Patriarch and Catholicos of All Armenians Karekin II, the Primate of the Russian Orthodox Church said, "We have felt as brothers for centuries in spite of the different mother tongues and irrespective of theological differences of our Churches. We lived within the borders of one state for a long time and have become closely linked with one another. Even now, active cooperation and contacts are being developed between our people." There are several Russian parishes in Armenia, while the Armenian parishes and dioceses are to be found in Russia, His Holiness Patriarch Kirill remarked. "You, Your Holiness, are doing a lot to support pastoral care exercised by the

clergyman of our Church for the Russian-speaking compatriots in Armenia," the Primate of the Russian Orthodox Church emphasized. "I hope that a representation of the Russian Orthodox Church will be established in Yerevan in the near future, thus providing another opportunity for a regular dialogue between our Churches."

Having highly appreciated the creative work of the Serbian filmmaker Emir Kusturica, His Holiness Patriarch Kirill noted, "The problem of mutual understanding between cultures is very topical in our versatile world, as the differences between them could bring about not only cooperation, but conflicts, too. But if the fruits of human creative work are melted in the hearth of religious experience, culture ceases to be a merely earthly activity, but opens up for co-work with God, and uplifts and ennobles people."

The Primate of the Russian Orthodox Church called St. Vladimir's seminary in New York founded in 1938 a worldwide famous centre of theological thought on the American continent. Thirty hierarchs and seven hundred clerics are its graduates. "St. Vladimir's seminary, which origins, renowned founders, and tradition of theological thought are linked with the Russian theological tradition, is a place for inter-Orthodox cooperation." His Holiness said.

His Holiness Patriarch Kirill and professor Valery Alekseyev presented the 2009 prizewinners with diplomas and commemorative marks.

While expressing his gratitude to the Primate of the Russian Orthodox Church, president of the Foundation and members of its Board of Trustees, His Holiness the Supreme Patriarch and Catholicos of All Armenians Karekin II said, "We receive this high award as a testimony of importance which the Russian Orthodox Church attaches to the mission of the Armenian Church in the life of the Armenian people and in the Christian world. The centuries-long Armenian-Russian friendship has been forged and tempered in common struggle of our nations who have stood shoulder to shoulder in it and in their common creative work. It has been witnessed by spiritual, cultural, political, and economic ties, by intellectual and scientific achievements, and by the irreversible and constantly developing cooperation. The rich traditions of our friendship should help us to combine our efforts for the sake of making our countries stronger, for the sake of welfare and happy life of our nations. We should consolidate mission and interaction of our Churches."

His Holiness the Supreme Patriarch and Catholicos of All Armenians Karekin II expressed his support to the work done by His Holiness Patriarch Kirill for affirming spiritual values in public life, education of the young generation, elaboration of Christians' answers to the problems which concern our contemporaries, as well as his efforts to consolidate interreligious relations.

The Primate of the Armenian Apostolic Church gave his prize money for the construction of a Russian church in Yerevan.

Russian President Dmitry Medvedev sees the IFUOCN prize as recognition of the great role of Russia in the development of inter-Orthodox dialogue. He emphasized that there have been many examples of mutual aid and solidarity in centuries-long human history. "There were times in the history of Orthodox nations when attempts were made to set us at variance, but they failed in the long run," President Medvedev said and expressed his confidence in the failure of such attempts in future.

The President said further that common spiritual and cultural values could bring the states and nations closer together. "The Orthodox Churches have traditionally played a considerable part in consolidation of fraternal ties. Taking advantage of the opportunity, I would like to note a great contribution of the Russian Orthodox Church into the development of interchurch dialogue. By reestablishing canonical communion, she has given an unprecedented example of overcoming mistrust and disunity, displayed a spirit of conciliarity and a strong uniting force. This is a very meaningful signal not only to the nations which profess Orthodoxy, but also to the entire world. This signal makes it clear that there are no insurmountable obstacles, when the Church, the state, or several states and societies have a single goal and aspire for unity. This is a very good example given in a rather difficult economic and social situation, in which the entire world finds itself at present."

President Medvedev considers an experience of cooperation between the state and the Russian Orthodox Church accumulated in Russia during the last twenty years in solving the key tasks facing the country as exceptionally fruitful. These tasks include education of the youth, preservation of national traditions and culture, and consolidation of peace and accord in the country. The head of the Russian state underscored that this service was rendered by the Church and personally by His Holiness Patriarch Kirill.

The Russian President highly appreciated social and charity projects of the International Foundation for the Unity of Orthodox Christian Nations.

"The Orthodox world is a large civilizational community which has brought the unique contribution into the development of humanity," he said. "It is important that we are willing to demonstrate such unity, to be engaged in a broad dialogue, including the interconfessional dialogue, which is particularly important in our country, to understand one another, and to work together for the sake of welfare and prosperity of our nations."

President Medvedev gave his prize money to Charity Foundation for Restoration of the Resurrection monastery in Novy Ierusalim and to the boarding schools.

While receiving the prize of the International Foundation for the Unity of Orthodox Christian Nations, Emir Kusturica spoke about the influence of the Russian author Fyodor Dostoevsky on his creative work. "Dostoevsky's book have helped me find solution of many problems in my life. When I was young, I had no notion of religion. I was mostly impressed by 'The Karamazov Brothers.'"

"I began to understand Dostoevsky better after my baptism. The elder Zosima said that the star would shine forth from the East, and the problems of life and death became united in the image of the star for me. The life and death of our Patriarch Pavle shines like this star, and I am seeing the light of this star when I receive the award of the International Foundation for the Unity of Orthodox Christian Nations," Emir Kusturica said.

The Very Rev. Dr. John Behr, dean of St. Vladimir's theological seminary expressed his thanks for the high award and noted, "We are especially happy to receive this award from a Russian Foundation as our roots go back to spiritual traditions of the Russian Church."

Fr. John said that over a thousand students have graduated from St. Vladimir's seminary thanks to the tireless work of such renowned church leaders as Metropolitan Leonty (Turkevich), protopresbyters Alexander Schmemmann and John Meyendorff, and archpriest Georgy Florovsky. The graduates have largely contributed to the witness about Orthodoxy in North America and in the entire world.

The 10th awarding ceremony was concluded with a concert, taking part in which were the well-known Russian performers, such as the Svetlanov Russian State Academic Symphony Orchestra, the Sveshnikov State Academic Choir, "Klassika" Chamber Choir, soloists of Moscow theatres, and other performers.

Source: <https://mospat.ru/en/news/57851/>