Patriarch Kirill's address to the 3d Congress of Compatriots

His Holiness Patriarch Kirill of Moscow and All Russia addressed the 3d World Congress of Compatriots living abroad at its opening on December 1, 2009, at the House of Unions Column Hall in Moscow.

Distinguished Assembly,

I cordially greet you all as you have come to Moscow for this representative forum. With a special feeling I would like to emphasize that we have gathered at the historical hall of the Nobility Assembly. Its very walls link us with the past, taking us mentally to the complicated developments of the 20th century which caused a substantial emigration from our country.

As is known, the cataclysms of the 20th century provoked several waves of this emigration. The first emigration was after the 1917 Revolution; then followed the hard years of the Great Patriotic War and, finally, economic and other problems involved in Russia's social development in the late 20 century led to the emergence of a third emigration wave. The three waves have always created a certain precondition for inner tension which existed and still exists in the Russian and Russian-speaking diaspora. These historical reasons however, which put a certain dividing wall for communication between our people abroad, are exacerbated today by new reasons, such as social disproportion, ownership differences and many other things.

I believe the unity of the far-abroad diaspora is a very important goal, first, for those who live in diaspora, because a cohesive diaspora acquires quite a different weight in the host society. But it is an important goal for Russia as well because in diaspora there are often people with a very active life position, with inner dynamism, with what is described as heightened passionarity, and a loss of these people for a country is a great loss. Therefore, it is important to think over the ways and means that would help to consolidate our diaspora.

It should be mentioned that cooperation in this area is intensively developing today between the Russian Orthodox Church and the Ministry for Foreign Affairs, and between the Church and other departments which are responsible for work abroad. I would like to point in particular to the cooperation with the Federal Agency for the CIS, Compatriots Living Abroad and International Humanitarian Cooperation, the Moscow Government and the Russian World foundation. Quite recently, a cooperation agreement was signed with it at its assembly. It would like once again, just as I did during that assembly, to point with

great satisfaction to the increasing dynamism of our bilateral relations.

Church parishes, being little islands of the historical Russia abroad, have become natural centers of the spiritual and cultural life of our compatriots. At parishes, people can pray together, meet, talk at tea parties, discuss their real problems and initiate contacts with compatriots. Our parishes are developing not only religious but also social activity today. This is because new people have appeared. Indeed, parishes become stronger and in some case even problem-free economically thanks to the development of various parish services. I would like to make a special mention of the appearance of parochial and diocesan mass media. Suffice it to mention such good periodicals as *Severny blagovestnik* published in Scandinavia, *Surozh* in Great Britain, *Vestnik Korsunskoi eparhii* in France, *Svet Pravoslavia* in Czechia. It seems to me that special attention should be given to this kind of parish work which is of great importance for the consolidation of our diaspora and that considerable support should be given to it.

It is important for our compatriots to preserve their national and cultural identity by continued efforts to establish Russian language centers. We discussed it at the Russian World assembly, and I would like to take it up once again. I believe these centers should be established at those Moscow Patriarchate parishes which do not have them yet. An important task here is to provide these centers with appropriate methodological and educational books and to support – through both the state and public organizations, I believe – such organizations as the Russian World, among others. As the experience of work abroad has shown, the principle of church-state separation should not prevent the state from supporting, among other things, the religious life of its compatriots in diaspora.

In the task of preserving the historical memory, of special importance are the activities linked with the Russian history and aimed at the far-abroad countries. Today they are often unsystematic, being held only thanks to the enthusiasm of individuals, especially rectors of our parishes in other countries. As an example I would like to point, in my view, to a very good initiative, namely, the 2009 St. George Ribbon Action in Iceland. Our parish there initiated this campaign which rallied people, marked their presence in the society and, most importantly, underscored their solidarity with our people who celebrate the Victory Day in this solemn way. It is necessary to seek a systematic approach and a high level of organization of all the concerned public and state forces in preserving our common historical past. And if we must take up the St. George Ribbon action, I would like to say that in 2010 we will mark the 65th anniversary of the Victory in the Great Patriotic War and will have to think together how this event should be celebrated in the diaspora too.

Concerning the commemoration dates, in 2013 Europe will mark the 200th anniversary of the famous Battle of Nations – the Battle of Leipzig. A magnificent church was built in Leipzig in honour of our compatriots who died in that battle. It was consecrated in 1913. I would propose that the 200th

anniversary of the Battle of Leipzig be marked with the participation of the church and state and public at large.

In recent times, our compatriots – citizens of other countries, who have been introduced to our spiritual tradition, show a desire to study at theological schools of the Russian Orthodox Church. It seems to me that we should encourage it in all possible ways, and I would ask the Russian State to help the young people who wish to study in theological schools in Russia with arranging their coming and obtaining visas. Perhaps in some cases it is also possible to think about giving them financial support, because in our provincial seminaries, local dioceses are not always able to provide young people to come from abroad with adequate accommodation.

In our concern for assigning educated pastors to our parishes abroad, we have opened a first Russian Orthodox seminary in the far abroad in Paris. This seminary will train not only clergy for France but also for other European countries. A special emphasis will be made on the study of the vernacular so that an Orthodox priest could feel involved in the Western European cultural context and, while educating this flock for love of the homeland and their own culture, he could feel free in the situation in which he works. It sometimes happens that priests who come to other countries do not have a full command of the local language, and this fetters their pastoral resources and their participation in the public and cultural life of the country in which they work.

An historic event took place recently as the Found-in-the-Roots Icon of Our Lady the Sign was brought to Kursk, to the fold of the Russian Orthodox Church. This icon was taken out during the revolutionary upheaval to become the main shrine of the Russian Diaspora.

I had an opportunity to meet this icon and bring it over from Moscow to Kursk and to participate in thousands-strong procession with the cross and the divine services that took place on the occasion. I believe no participant in that event could stay indifferent. I have never seen such a great multitude of people coming for prayer. The police gave different figures, but it was quite clear that over 400 thousand people joined the festivities. People marched along the main street in Kursk. Those who did not march stayed along the street, kneeling before the icon in prayer. Then this tremendous multitude poured out to the city main square to fill it all, while some had to remain standing in the adjoining streets. One could feel the power of people’s prayer to understand what a great importance faith has in their life and what a great importance this icon, a symbol of the Russian Diaspora, is for Russia. We continue living in different countries; some were born outside Russia, but we have symbols and values which unite us and preserve the Russian World which exists in many countries – the Russian World as a special spiritual value system.

Compatriots’ assimilation presents a serious challenge to their consolidation. Developing this theme, I

would like first of all to thank the first wave of the Russian emigration which has preserved the Russian language in a severe economic and political situation, has preserved the faith and has preserved the love of the Motherland. One should remark that sometimes the third generation of those who were born in these families speaks better Russian that the third wave does. Among this wave's people there are often those, especially among young people, who admire their newly-acquired accent. They take pleasure in speaking Russian with a foreign accent, thus rejecting the Russian language, Russian culture and Orthodox faith.

After all, it doesn't matter where a person lives. Our call to consolidate the diaspora does not mean that we call them to come back to Russia. In a free society a person can choose a place to live. But why a life outside Russia should mean a loss of our people? We lost so many in the terrible 20th century in the Revolution, Civil War, World War II and cataclysms caused by the disintegration of once united state. We lost dozens and dozens of millions of people. We would have been quantitatively quite a different people, if it had not been for the tragedy of the 20th century. But if now the openness of the country will lead to a sharp decrease in the number of Russian people and Russian-speaking people and to a derogation of Russian culture, it will be an irreparable mistake, a sin which will lie on us all.

At the same time, our brothers and sisters should not feel themselves social outcasts in their host societies. They should be employed and socially and legally protected; they should not feel themselves second-class citizens. The Russian diaspora should not be a second-class diaspora because a country is judged by its diaspora. For this very reason our compatriots living in the far-abroad countries should have the command of local languages, should be aware of the local law, culture, traditions and customs and should be qualified professionally so that they could work and live in a dignified way. The Moscow Patriarchate welcomes the appearance of public and human rights organizations of compatriots and is ready to work together with them. Already today our parishes exert every effort to help our compatriots enter organically the environment of their host countries, while preserving their own identity. Parishes sometimes help our compatriots to study the local language, to find jobs and to get advice on social matters.

In a situation where the development of countries depends to a large extent on external factors and generally on the system of international cooperation, the role that our compatriots living abroad play in the national life of the Russian World countries increases many times over and will continue to grow.

I hope that this Congress will help to clarify approaches in the task of consolidating our compatriots abroad and to improve the mechanisms aimed at implementation of all these wishes.

I invoke God's blessing upon you and wish you fruitful work.

Source: https://mospat.ru/en/news/58092/