



The 4th Pan-Orthodox Pre-Council Conference completes its work

The 4th Pan-Orthodox Pre-Council Conference, which took place at the Patriarchate of Constantinople's Orthodox Center in Chambesy near Geneva, completed its work on 12 June 2009. The delegation of the Russian Orthodox Church led by Archbishop Hilarion of Volokolamsk, chairman of the Moscow Patriarchate's department for external church relations, included Archbishop Mark of Berlin, Germany and Great Britain, Russian Church Outside Russia, Archpriest Nikolay Balashov, DECR vice-chairman, and Mr. A. Churyakov, an interpreter.

The conference was chaired by Metropolitan John of Pergamon. Metropolitan Jeremiah of Switzerland, Patriarchate of Constantinople, acted as its secretary. It was attended by delegations of the Patriarchates of Constantinople, Alexandria, Antioch, Jerusalem, Georgia, Serbia, Romania and Bulgaria as well as Orthodox Churches of Cyprus, Greece, Albania, Poland, Czech Lands and Slovakia. They were led by their hierarchs.

His Holiness Patriarch Kirill of Moscow and All Russia addressed a message of greetings to the conference.

As had been agreed by primates and representatives of Local Orthodox Churches at their meeting in October 2008 at Fanar and reaffirmed by subsequent correspondence, the 4th Conference focused on the canonical order of the Orthodox diaspora. This decision on the agenda was made by the participants in the beginning of their work. The rest of the agenda items for Pan-Orthodox Pre-Council Conferences, including a procedure for declaring autocephaly and autonomy and the diptych order, will be considered in the sessions to follow the preparatory work to be done by the Inter-Orthodox Preparatory Commission.

The participants considered documents prepared by the Inter-Orthodox Preparatory Commission at its meetings on 10-17 November 1990 and 7-13 November 1993 and the conference of canon law experts which took place on 9-14 April 2009 in Chambesy. The documents were clarified and amended by consensus.

The conference agreed that the problem concerning the canonical order of the Orthodox diaspora, that is, those faithful who reside beyond the traditional boundaries of Local Orthodox Churches, should be dealt with on the basis of ecclesiology, canonical tradition and practice of the Orthodox Church. To this end, it was agreed to set up bishops' assemblies consisting of all the canonical Orthodox bishops who

take pastoral care of the community in a given locality. The task of bishops' assemblies will be to ascertain and consolidate the unity of the Orthodox Church, to provide common pastoral care for Orthodox people in a region and to bear common witness before the external world. The assemblies' decisions are to be made on the basis of consensus reached by the Churches whose bishops are represented in them. The authority of a bishops' assembly exclude interference in the diocesan jurisdiction of each of the bishops and does not restrict the rights of his Church including in her relations with international organizations, governments, the civil society and mass media as well as other confessions, governmental and inter-confessional organizations and other religions.

The conference also adopted a revised draft procedure defining basically the work of regional bishops' assemblies in the Orthodox diaspora.

DECR Communication Service

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