



## **DECR chairman attended the opening of the 7th Congress of Leaders of World and Traditional Religions**



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On September 14, the Congress of Leaders of World and Traditional Religions, hosted by the Kazakhstan authorities for the seventh time, was opened in Kazakhstan's capital Nur-Sultan.

With a blessing of His Holiness Patriarch Kirill of Moscow and All Russia, a delegation of the Russian Orthodox Church takes part in the forum. The delegation includes Metropolitan Anthony of Volokolamsk, chairman of the Department for External Church Relations of the Moscow Patriarchate (head of the delegation); Metropolitan Kirill of Kazan and Tatarstan; Archimandrite Philaret (Bulekov), DECR vice-chairman; and Rev. Dimitry Safonov, DECR secretary for interreligious relations.

Among the participants in the event are His Beatitude Theophilos, Patriarch of Jerusalem and All

Palestine; Metropolitan Alexander of Astana and Kazakhstan, head of the Metropolis of Kazakhstan; Metropolitan Theodore of Achalciche, Taoklardžeti and Lazi (Georgian Orthodox Church), Bishop Savvaty of Bishkek and Kyrgyzstan; Archimandrite Alexis (Nikonorov), secretary of the Diocese of Baku; Archimandrite Sergius (Karamyshev), dean of the Astana municipal district; Hieromonk Kirill (Korytko), secretary of the Metropolis of Tatarstan; V. I. Yakunin, chairman of the Supervisory Board of the Dialogue of Civilizations research institute; and S. A. Gavr, President of the Inter-Parliamentary Assembly of Orthodoxy.

The congress started its work with a plenary session on 'The role of leaders of world and traditional religions in the spiritual and social development of humanity in the post-pandemic period'. The session was moderated by M. S. Ashimbayev, chairman of the Senate of the Kazakhstan Parliament.

President of the Republic of Kazakhstan K.K. Tokayev, in greeting the participants, spoke about 'the common commitment to preserving peace and fostering the inter-civilizational dialogue' and noted that 'in the era of changes and uncertainty, today's meeting acquires a special importance'. He also stressed that 'in today's complex realities, it is extremely important that religious leaders, sitting at one table, show to the whole world and example of good will that overcomes any differences. It is in this, in my view, lies the main mission and the distinctive feature of the Congress'. He also stressed that 'it is impossible to remove arising contradictions by force, threats or sanctions. At such moments, it is especially important to remember the humanistic ideals, and the traditional religions are their principal guardians'.

Speaking next were Pope Francis and Grand Imam of Al-Azhar University Sheikh Ahmed At-Tayeb.

Metropolitan Anthony of Volokolamsk, who leads the delegation of the Russian Orthodox Church, read out a message from His Holiness Patriarch Kirill of Moscow and All Russia, which states in particular, 'The way of dictatorship, rivalry and confrontation chosen by some rulers of this world leads humanity to death. In this situation, it is faith that is capable of sobering people and put them back on the way of dialogue and cooperation; for traditional religions preserve the unshakable and fundamental moral principle of human existence'.

In his speech, Metropolitan Anthony pointed to the special responsibility of religious leaders for people's lives in today's complex world history. He underlined that the paradigm of the modern mass culture, offered by proponent of secular godless worldview, leads to 'the elevation of human vices and deviations over the value of healthy human society, which have been inspired by the Creator and have been preserved for thousands of years, while 'today events on the world arena, which include a threat of famine and world war, are nothing else but a consequence of indulgence in human vice'. The best response to modern challenges is 'the dialogue of religions, broad development of religious education,

solidarity of believers on the basis of common moral foundations', the DECR chairman stated with confidence.

Statements were also made by Ashkenazi Chief Rabbi David Lau and, in video-message, by UN Secretary General António Guterres, which were followed by the ceremony of awarding 'The Astana International Prize for Contribution to the Interreligious Dialogue' and the Honorary Medal of the Congress. Metropolitan Anthony of Volokolamsk became one of the winners.

After the ceremony, the plenary session was addressed by religious leaders from Saudi Arabia, Israel, China and Russia, as well as high-ranking officials from UN, OSCE and representatives of major interreligious organizations.

The first day of the forum concluded with an official reception given by the President of the Republic of Kazakhstan.

On the 15<sup>th</sup> of September, the Congress will continue its work meeting in sections.

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