Primate of the Assyrian Church of the East arrives in Russia



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On November 11, His Holiness Catholicos-Patriarch Mar Awa III, Primate of the Assyrian Church of the East, arrived in Russia at the invitation of His Holiness Patriarch Kirill of Moscow and All Rus'. This is the first official visit of Catholicos-Patriarch to the Russian Orthodox Church.

The delegation that is accompanying Mar Awa III includes His Grace Mar Afram Athneil, Bishop of Syria; His Grace Mar Narsai Benjamin, Bishop of Iran, Armenia and Georgia; His Grace Mar Abris Tyari, Patriarchal Auxiliary Bishop in Erbil; Very Rev. Chor-Bishop Samano Odisho, representative of the Assyrian Church of the East in Russia; Rev. Priest Ephraim Alkhass, personal assistant of His

Holiness Catholicos-Patriarch Mar Awa III; Rev.Priest Nikodim Yukhanayev, clergyman of the Diocese of Iran, Armenia and Georgia; Rev. Priest Peter Pavlov, prior of the Assyrian parish in Krasnodar.

Meeting the high guest and his suite at Vnukovo airport on behalf of His Holiness Patriarch Kirill were Bishop Clement of Krasnoslobodsk and Temnikov, co-chairman of the Commission for Dialogue between the Russian Orthodox Church and the Assyrian Church of the East; hieromonk Stefan (Igumnov), secretary for inter-Christian relations of the Moscow Patriarchate's Department for External Church Relations (DECR); hierodeacon Petr (Akhmatkhanov) of the DECR secretariat for inter-Christian relations; representatives of the Moscow parish of the Assyrian Church of the East and of the Russian Assyrian community.

That same day, the guests visited the Intercession stavropegic convent where His Holiness Catholicos-Patriarch Mar Awa III will be accommodated during his stay in Moscow. Mother superior Feofania (Miskina) warmly greeted the high guest and members of the delegation who venerated the honourable relics of St. Matrona of Moscow, saw churches and buildings of the convent and were introduced to the work of the orphanage for girls.

The program of the visit that will last till November 16 includes meetings with His Holiness Patriarch Kirill of Moscow and All Rus'; Metropolitan Anthony of Volokolamsk, chairman of the Moscow Patriarchate's Department for External Church Relations; and representatives of state authorities of the Russian Federation; as well as visits to Moscow churches, monasteries and convents, and educational institutions of the Russian Orthodox Church.

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The Assyrian Church of the East (officially the Holy Apostolic Catholic Assyrian Church of the East) came into being in Mesopotamia in the 1st century. According to legend, it was established by Apostles Peter, Bartholomew, Thaddeus and Thomas.

The Assyrian Church of the East recognizes the first two ecumenical councils: the First Council of Nicea (325) and the First Council of Constantinople (381) and is considered the only Christian Church following the "pre-Ephesus" tradition.

The membership of the Assyrian Church is estimated to some 400,000 adherents, most of them living in diaspora. This number increased considerably over the last decade due to forced migration from their ancestral homeland – Iraq and Syria. The Assyrians, like other Christians in the Middle East, have been severely persecuted by the so-called Islamic State, or ISIS (banned in the Russian Federation), and other terrorist and extremist organizations.

The Assyrian community has traditionally played a prominent role in the life of Russian society. Living in Russia and in the near abroad are several tens of thousands of Assyrians, mostly the descendants of refugees who fled the Ottoman Empire in the early 20th century.

His Holiness Catholicos-Patriarch Mar Awa III was born to a family of Assyrian emigrants in the United States on July 4, 1975. He was ordained deacon in 1992, priest in 2006, and elevated to the rank of bishop in 2008. From 2015 to 2021, he served as secretary of the Synod and president of the Commission on Inter-Church Relations and Educational Development and as co-chairman of the Commission for Dialogue between the Russian Orthodox Church and the Assyrian Church of the East.

He made several visits to the Moscow Patriarchate during his years as a bishop.

On September 13, 2021, he was consecrated and enthroned as Catholicos-Patriarch of the Assyrian Church of the East.

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