Metropolitan Anthony speaks at session of the council of the Imperial Orthodox Palestine Society



Communications Service of the DECR, 24.12.2022.

On 23rd December under the chairmanship of Sergei Stepashin there took place a summary meeting of the Council of the Imperial Orthodox Palestine (IOPS) Society at the IOPS Centre. The meeting was held in a mixed format: taking part online were a number of the Council members and invited leaders fr om most of the regional and overseas branches, reports the site of the IOPS.

The event was attended by many members of the Society's Council including: the special representative of the Russian president for the Middle East and Africa and deputy foreign minister Mikhail Bogdanov; the chancellor of the Moscow Patriarchate the metropolitan Voskresensk Dionysius; the chairman of the Department of External Church Relations of the Moscow Patriarchate the metropolitan of Volokolamsk Anthony; the chairman of the oversight committee of the Saint Elizabeth

and Saint Sergius Society for Enlightenment charitable foundation Anna Gromova; the head of the section for contacts with public organizations of the Department for Relations with the Media and Society of the Moscow Patriarchate archpriest Dimitry Roschin; the president of the history faculty of Moscow State University, academician Sergei Karpov; the head of the regional Moscow branch of the IOPS Oleg Shabunevich; the head of the district Moscow branch of the IOPS Yuri Smirnov; the head of the Society's section for pilgrimages and secretary of the Department for Charity and Social Ministry hegumen Seraphim (Kravchenko); the secretary for interreligious relations of the DECR Father Dimitry Safonov; member of the Imperial Orthodox Palestine Society Oleg Fomin; deputy chairman of the IOPS Georgy Venevich; and secretary of the IOPS Alexander Dolinin.

Taking part by video call in the Council's work were the deputy chairman of the Imperial Orthodox Palestine Society and head of the Public Centre of the IOPS for the protection of Christians in the Middle East and North Africa Yelena Agapova.

Among the guests of honour at the session were the mother superior of the Ss. Martha and Mary Convent abbess Elizabeth (Pozdnyakov), the director of the Solzhenitsin House of the Russian Abroad Viktor Moskvin and special ambassador of the Russian foreign ministry Anatoly Yurkov.

Taking part online also were the head of the Federal Agency for the Commonwealth of Independent States Affairs, Compatriots Living Abroad, and International Humanitarian Cooperation and member of the Council of IOPS Yevgeny Primakov, the director general of the State Hermitage Museum and member of the Council of the IOPS Mikhail Piotrovsky and the head of the Nizhny Novgorod branch of the IOPS and Society council member Oleg Kolobov.

In his presentation the chairman of the oldest international public organization in Russia Sergei Stepashin summed up the work of the Society for the outgoing year, mentioning the more important socially significant initiatives and reviewing the basic areas of the Society's scholarly, cultural and educational work and its endeavours in supporting compatriots.

He also reminded people that 2022 was marked by the 140th anniversary of the foundation of the Imperial Orthodox Palestine Society. Festivities on the occasion of the jubilee took place on 3rd June in the House of the Russian Abroad. The festive session was preceded by the V election conference of the IOPS, which took place with the blessing of His Holiness the Patriarch of Moscow and All Russia Kirill, the chairman of the Committee for Honourary Members of the Society.

Sergei Stepashin emphasized the point that the geography of the Society had significantly broadened: the number of branches in Russia had reached sixty, while overseas at present there were thirty-two representation offices of IOPS. Work is currently taking place on setting up representations of the IOPS

in Thailand, Chile and Argentina.

In his summing up of the work of the Society in the year of the 140th anniversary of its foundation, Sergei Stepashin noted that the IOPS maintained its relevance and influence, including in the difficult international arena. The Society had put into motion large-scale humanitarian and cultural and educational projects both in Russia and overseas, including in the Holy Land, at the representation of Saint Sergius in Jerusalem, actively supported Christians in the Middle East, carried out scholarly activities and publications and had also worked on ensuring the honouring of the memory of the Society's founders; the youth and volunteer movements within the Society had also developed.

Badges were also ceremoniously awarded to honourary and actual members of the Imperial Orthodox Palestine Society.

Then spoke the deputy chairman of the IOPS and special representative of the Russian president for the Middle East and Africa deputy Russian foreign minister Mikhail Bogdanov, who conveyed to those gathered greetings and congratulations from the head of the Russian foreign ministry Sergei Lavrov on the occasion of the forthcoming New Year and Nativity of Christ. In his presentation the deputy foreign minister touched upon a number of issues of the joint work on a wide spectrum of problems in the Middle East, the historical, cultural and spiritual presence of Russia in the Holy Land, the joint work of the Russian foreign ministry and the IOPS in humanitarian projects and in resolving the complex issues of returning historical Russian property. Mikhail Bogdanov emphasized that under the aegis of the oldest public organization in Russia various important projects aimed at forming an objective image of Russia overseas were being implemented.

There then spoke the member of the Council of the IOPS and chairman of the Department of External Church Relations the metropolitan of Volokolamsk Anthony. The bishop conveyed greetings and good wishes from His Holiness the Patriarch of Moscow and All Russia Kirill, chairman of the Committee of Honourary Members of the Imperial Orthodox Palestine Society.

Metropolitan Anthony highly valued the constructive and prolific interaction that has historically ensued between the IOPS and the Russian Orthodox Church and her Primate. As chairman of the Department for External Church Relations, the metropolitan of Volokolamsk Anthony noted the importance of the Society's work abroad and pointed out that worthy of attention were the endeavours aimed at resolving the issue of returning historical Russian property in the Holy Land.

The bishop gave a high evaluation to the work of the Russian in the Holy Land Museum which had been set up at the Saint Sergius Representation in Jerusalem. The opening of the museum coincides with the 140th anniversary of Imperial Orthodox Palestine Society and the fifth anniversary of the rebirth of the

aforementioned representation. The museum is dedicated to the unique history of this representation, the IOPS and Orthodox pilgrimages to the Holy Land. Alongside rare documents and photographs, on display were also genuine artefacts of the way of life of pilgrims at the turn of the twentieth century.

Metropolitan Anthony expressed the hope that all these labours would continue in the future and that the Imperial Orthodox Palestine Society would enable the further all-round strengthening of the spiritual ties of Russia with the Holy Land.

Further, the bishop announced that Patriarchal certificates would be awarded to representatives of the Russian foreign ministry. For their support for the church and societal initiatives awards were granted to the special ambassador of the Russian foreign ministry and actual member of the IOPS Anatoly Yurkov, the senior advisor of the general secretariat (department) of the Russian foreign ministry Ruslan Ramazanov and the second secretary of the general secretariat (department) of the Russian foreign ministry Artyom Chirkin.

The chancellor of the Moscow Patriarchate the metropolitan of Voskresensk Dionysius also spoke at the session of the Council of the Imperial Orthodox Palestine Society. The bishop particularly noted that the Church highly valued the many-sided work of the Imperial Orthodox Palestine Society.

The next to speak was the deputy chairman of the IOPS and head of the oversight committee of the Ss. Elizabeth and Sergius Society for Enlightenment Anna Gromova, who noted that the work of the Imperial Orthodox Palestine Society today had assumed the shape of a significant public movement that has an influence on the life of the country in its foreign policy, education, culture and charitable work.

In a video link-up a presentation was given by the deputy chairman of the Imperial Orthodox Palestine Society and head of the Public Centre of the IOPS for the protection of Christians in the Middle East and North Africa Yelena Agapova. She touched upon the work of this organization for the protection of Christians in the Middle East and other regions of the world, as well as on the topic of interreligious dialogue which had great peace-making potential. It was noted that at present that those who confess the Christian faith are the main victims of religious persecution in the world: more than 360 million Christians suffer from persecution and violence on all continents and every day thirty Christians around the world die for their faith. Unfortunately, noted Yelena Agapova, the tendency of the Christian population towards diminishing in the Middle East is continuing. It was also noted that one of the centres of persecution of Christians was Africa, wh ere every fifth Christian was subject to persecution, part of which includes the use of violence.

There were then presentations given to those present by the heads of the sections of the Imperial Orthodox Palestine Society: the scholarly section headed by Sergei Zhitenyov, the international section

headed by the special ambassador of the Russian foreign ministry Oleg Ozerov, the youth section headed by Oleg Robinov, the cultural and educational section headed by Pavel Karpukhin, as well as the representative of the Imperial Orthodox Palestine Society in the LPR, DPR, the regions of Kherson and Zaporizhzhia Simos Panagiotidis and the editor of the IOPS website Yekaterina Yefremova.

Source: https://mospat.ru/en/news/89894/