



## Metropolitan Anthony of Volokolamsk takes part in IOPS Council meeting



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A meeting of the Council of the Imperial Orthodox Palestine Society (IOPS) took place in Moscow on the 21<sup>st</sup> April under the chairmanship of Sergey Stepashin.

The meeting was attended, in particular, by: Metropolitan Anthony of Volokolamsk, Chairman of the Department for External Church Relations of the Moscow Patriarchate, Vice-Chairman of the IOPS; Anna Gromova, Chairman of the Supervisory Board of the Elisabethan St. Sergius Educational Society Foundation for the Revival of Traditions of Charity, Deputy Chairman of the Moscow Regional Branch of the IOPS; Oleg Shabunevich, the Head of the Moscow Regional Branch of the IOPS; Yuri Smirnov, the Head of the Pilgrimage Office of the Moscow Region of the IOPS.

In addition, Mikhail Piotrovsky, Director General of the State Hermitage, member of the IOPS Council; Elena Agapova, Deputy Chairman of the Imperial Orthodox Palestine Society, Head of the IOPS Public Center for the Protection of Christians in the Middle East and North Africa; Igor Ashourbeyli, Chairman of the IOPS Council in Israel; Natalia Narochnikskaya, Doctor of Historical Science, President of the Historical Perspective Foundation, member of the IOPS Council; Natalia Soboleva, Head of the IOPS Bethlehem branch, member of the Council of the Russian Orthodox Church; and Yuri Gonchar, President of the IOPS Board of Trustees, participated in an online meeting.

During the meeting an award ceremony was held for full members of the Society, the IOPS website reports.

Metropolitan Anthony of Volokolamsk, Chairman of the Department for External Church Relations of the Moscow Patriarchate and Deputy Chairman of IOPS, addressed the audience with a welcoming address. The archpastor conveyed greetings and good wishes from His Holiness Patriarch Kirill of Moscow and All Russia, who is the Chairman of the Committee of Honorary Members of the Imperial Orthodox Palestine Society. Metropolitan Anthony underlined that His Holiness Patriarch attaches great importance to the work of the Society in many directions. The hierarch commended the historically constructive and fruitful level of interaction between the Russian Orthodox Church and IOPS.

As Chairman of the Department for External Church Relations of the Moscow Patriarchate, Metropolitan Anthony of Volokolamsk noted the high level of work carried out by the Imperial Orthodox Palestinian Society abroad and expressed the hope that the multifaceted work of the IOPS would continue in the future, including contributing to the all-round strengthening of Russia's spiritual ties with the Holy Land.

In his report, Sergey Stepashin, Chairman of the Imperial Orthodox Palestinian Society, summed up the main results of the activities of this oldest international public organisation during the reporting period, highlighting the most significant initiatives. Among them was the provision of humanitarian aid, including Donbass and Syria, which had suffered from the recent devastating earthquake. He pointed out that the humanitarian activities carried out by the Society in today's difficult circumstances were a continuation of the historical traditions of the IOPS. The speech also highlighted the active work of the Society's regional branches.

A key aspect of IOPS's work is its international activities. Sergey Stepashin stressed that to date, 34 representative offices abroad are active. Organization of the Egyptian office is in the final stages of closure. In 2023, the oldest international public organization had reached the historical maximum in the number of its foreign missions. The Chairman of the IOPS stressed that the Society is facing the task of expanding its presence in the countries of North Africa.

Speaking about the difficult international situation, Sergey Stepashin drew the attention of those present to the fact that the oldest international non-governmental organisation has given a serious assessment of the events taking place in Kiev-Pechersk Lavra.

In his report, the Chairman of the IOPS paid attention to the work of the Cultural and Educational Section. He noted the success of a number of educational and charitable activities. Sergei Stepashin also mentioned the presentation of the book series "Corpus of Christian Texts and Research" of the Centre for the Study of Patristics and Christian Antiquities at the Moscow Theological Academy, which took place at the IOPS Centre. Sergei Stepashin also touched on information activities, noting that the official website of the IOPS promptly responds to all significant events for the Society.

Summing up the results of the reporting period, Sergey Stepashin noted that IOPS continues to prove its viability and effectiveness, which includes work in a difficult international environment.

The following speeches were made by Oleg Shabunovich, head of the Moscow Regional Branch of the Society, Sergey Zhitenev, head of the IOPS Scientific Section, Anna Gromova, chairman of the Supervisory Board of the Elisabeth-Sergius Enlightenment Society Foundation, Deputy Chairman of the IOPS, Igor Ashurbeyli, Chairman of the IOPS State Council in Israel, Head of the Pilgrimage Section of the IOPS, Hegumen Serafim (Kravchenko), Head of the Syrian branch of the Society, Michel Al-Thali, Head of the Cyprus branch of the IOPS, Leonid Bulanov, Head of the IOPS Youth Section, Oleg Robinov, Head of the Moscow Regional Branch of the IOPS, Yuri Smirnov.

Daniel Burdyga, Director of the IOPS, introduced the Council to the issue of admission of new members to the Society. All nominations were unanimously approved.

The session was followed by a screening of the documentary film "Russia in the Holy Land", commissioned by the Imperial Orthodox Palestine Society and supported by the Ministry of Culture of the Russian Federation.

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