



## Delegation of the Church of India comes to Russia



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With a blessing of His Holiness Patriarch Kirill of Moscow and All Russia, a delegation of the Malankara Church of India came to Moscow on April 24 to attend the second session of the Working Group for Coordinating Bilateral Relations between the Russian Orthodox Church and the Malankara Church.

The delegation includes Metropolitan Abraham Mar Stephanos, head of the Diocese of Great Britain, Europe and Africa, and Rev. Ashwin Fernandez, executive director of the Malankara Church Department for External Church Relations.

Participants in the session from the Moscow Patriarchate are Metropolitan Leonid of Klin, Patriarchal Exarch for Africa, co-chairman of the Working Group; Hieromonk Stephen (Igumnov), DECR secretary for inter-Christian relations and secretary of the Working Group; Deacon Dimitry Serov, director of the Moscow Theological Academy Publishers; Hierodeacon Petr (Ahmathanov), DECR staff member.

The visit to Russia began with a call to the Patriarchal Convent of the Intercession in which the Indian delegation will stay while in the fold of the Russian Orthodox Church.

The Working Group session was opened by Metropolitan Leonid of Klin, who welcomed the guests on behalf of His Holiness Patriarch Kirill of Moscow and All Russia. He said in particular

‘This holy place is well known to you as you stayed in this convent of Blessed Matrona of Moscow when you accompanied His Holiness Catholicos Basil Mar Thomas Paulose II during his official visit to Russia in 2019. That historic meeting of the two Primate resulted in establishing, our Working Group which is holding its second session.

Since our first meeting in February 2020, many events have happened in Kottayam. The world has been overtaken by the coronavirus pandemic. Nevertheless, by God’s mercy our people have held out against this disastrous disease. In July 2021, the Malankara Church suffered the loss of its Primate - His Holiness Basil Mar Thomas Paulose II. I witnessed how deeply His Holiness was involved in the agenda of the bilateral relations, how concerned he was for the development of all the current areas of our cooperation, how genuine was his love for Russia and the Russian Church’.

Then the participants in the session honoured the memory of His Holiness Catholicos Basil Mar Thomas Paulose II.

‘At the same time, our Church rejoices in the 15 October 2021 election of the new Primate of the Malankara Church - His Holiness Baselios Marthoma Mathews III. I am confident that the new Catholicos will continue the good cause initiated by his predecessor to foster fraternal relations between our two Churches at the present stage’, Metropolitan Leonid continued.

‘In spite of the period of coronavirus restrictions, we have managed to implement a number of projects planned previously. At the same time, life has shown us new areas of cooperation. We will discuss this broad range of our bilateral relations during our session. The meeting of the Working Group offers us an opportunity for telling each other about the present state of affairs in our Churches and for sharing the actual information of importance for the whole Christian world community’, the hierarch stressed.

His Eminence also pointed to the importance of bilateral interaction on inter-Christian platforms, in particular in the World Council of Churches.

‘I would like to express gratitude to the Malankara Church delegation headed by the Working Group co-chairman, Metropolitan Zachariah Mar Nikovolos, for the support given to the Russian Orthodox Church

at the WCC 11<sup>th</sup> Assembly in Karlsruhe, Germany, in 2022 and for the opposition to the attempts to discriminate the Russian Orthodox Church', Metropolitan Leonid said. His Eminence also thanked the representatives of the Malankara Church for their understanding of the Moscow Patriarchate's stance over the situation around Ukraine and the persecutions carried out in that country against the canonical Orthodox Church.

In his response, Metropolitan Abraham Mar Stephanos thanked the Russian Orthodox Church for the hospitality and the readiness to continue developing the bilateral relations, especially in the work of the Working Group for Coordinating the Bilateral Relations, stressing that 'its establishment was the right decision bringing forth abundant fruits today'.

'With the blessing of the Primate of the Malankara Church and the Holy Synod we have come to Moscow to attest to Russia and the Russian Orthodox Church the love and friendship of the Church of St. Thomas and the Indian people at this time difficult for the Orthodox world', Metropolitan Mar Stephanos said.

The representatives of the Malankara Church also expressed gratitude to the Russian Church for the preparation of a film about St. Thomas and his Indian legacy. Its first part was shown by the TV channel 'Spas' on April 23, 2023, the Sunday of St. Thomas.

During the stay of the Malankara Church delegation in Moscow, which will last until April 27, they are to meet with His Holiness Patriarch Kirill of Moscow and All Russia and visit the Diocese of Yaroslavl, and churches and monasteries in Moscow and the Moscow region.

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