



## Moscow Patriarchate representatives attend festivities of the Assyrian Church of the East in Iraq



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Celebration of the opening and consecration of the new Patriarchal Cathedral dedicated to the Holy Apostles Thomas, Thaddeus and Mari and the opening of the Patriarchal Headquarters took place in Ankawa, Erbil's Christian district, the Kurdistan Region of Iraq, on August 4-8, 2023. On those same dates, the capital of the autonomous Kurdish region of northern Iraq hosted the 1<sup>st</sup> World Assyrian Church Youth Conference with several hundred participants having gathered here from all over the world.

Attending the festivities at the invitation of His Holiness Mar Awa III, Catholicos-Patriarch of the Assyrian Church of the East, and with the blessing of His Holiness Patriarch Kirill of Moscow and All

Rus' were Archimandrite Philip (Vasiltsev), representative of the Patriarch of Moscow and All Russia to the Patriarch of Antioch; deacon Yevgeny Yesaulenko of the Synodal Department for Youth Affairs; and Mr. Sergei G. Alferov, a staff member of the Moscow Patriarchate's Department for External Church Relations and a member of the Commission for Dialogue between the Russian Orthodox Church and the Assyrian Church of the East.

On August 5, the delegation from Russia attended the inauguration of the Patriarchal Headquarters. Presiding over the ceremony were His Holiness Patriarch-Catholicos Mar Awa III and Mr. Nechirvan Barzini, the President of the Kurdistan Region. Present were members of the Synod and numerous clerics of the Assyrian Church of the East from all over the world; representatives of the Kurdistan Regional Government and of General Consulates of foreign countries in Erbil; delegates from traditional Christian confessions and Muslim communities in northern Iraq, as well as from international Catholic organizations, namely the Community of Sant'Egidio and Pro Oriente Foundation.

On August 6, representatives of the Russian Orthodox Church attended the consecration of the Patriarchal Cathedral performed by His Holiness Catholicos-Patriarch Mar Awa III. He celebrated the first Liturgy together with over one hundred bishops and clerics of the Assyrian Church of the East. Solemn reception at the Patriarch's residence followed.

That same day, the Primate of the Assyrian Church had a number of meetings with the heads of foreign delegations.

Archimandrite Philip greeted His Holiness Catholicos-Patriarch Mar Awa III on behalf of His Holiness Patriarch Kirill of Moscow and All Rus' and presented him with a Korsun Icon of the Mother of God.

On August 7, members of the Russian Orthodox Church delegation were received by the head of the Assyrian Christians. The meeting was joined by Metropolitan Mar Afram Athneil, Bishop of Syria; Chorbishop Samano Odisho, representative of the Assyrian Church of the East in Russia; and Mr. Maxim O. Rubin, Consul General of the Russian Federation in Erbil.

The Primate of the Assyrian Church of the East cordially welcomed the delegation from Russia and noted the significance of the centuries-long fraternal relations between the Russian and Assyrian people. He thanked His Holiness Patriarch Kirill for his kind attention to the Assyrian faithful living in Russia and in other countries of the Moscow Patriarchate's canonical responsibility and expressed high opinion of the work of the Commission for Dialogue between the two Churches and its initiatives. His Holiness Mar Awa III expressed profound concern about the situation in Ukraine, frequently reported facts of discrimination against clerics and faithful of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church, the latest events around the Kiev Lavra of the Caves, and a guilty verdict against Metropolitan Ionafan of Tulchyn and

Bratslav.

“Every time I hear news from Ukraine, I feel a burning pain in my heart. Together with my brothers archpastors, clergymen and faithful we have expressed and will continue to express our solidarity with my beloved brother His Holiness Patriarch Kirill and with the spiritual head of the Ukrainian Orthodox, His Beatitude Metropolitan Onufriy, and all the flock entrusted to his care. Every day we lift up our ardent prayers for the Russian Orthodox Church and the Russian state, for abundant God’s aid to them at this hard and maybe fateful time. Beyond any tiny shade of a doubt, the spirit of hatred and enmity towards everything Russian and Orthodox has been inspired by the devil. Yes, he had managed to commit many atrocities, but we know and firmly believe that he will not have the last word,” said Catholicos-Patriarch of the Assyrian Church of the East.

In his address, Archimandrite Philip expressed profound gratitude to His Holiness Catholicos-Patriarch Mar Awa III for sincere understanding of the Moscow Patriarchate’s position on the situation in Ukraine and for his repeated public statements against unfounded discriminatory measures applied against the Russian Orthodox Church and Russia.

He said: “May I convey to Your Holiness heartfelt gratitude of His Holiness Patriarch Kirill of Moscow and All Rus’ and of the plenitude of our millions-strong Church. We highly appreciate your fraternal support and harmony of our views. May the Lord favour and preserve Assyrian Christians who have got this magnificent cathedral, a new holy place in the biblical land of Mesopotamia. Many and good years to You and all Your flock!”

Discussed were issues of mutual interest, including prospects for intensifying bilateral cooperation at major international forums.

At the end of the audience, the participants exchanged souvenirs.

During their stay in Erbil, members of the Russian Orthodox Church delegation had talks with several high-ranking guests of the festivities and working meetings with top officials of Consulate General of the Russian Federation. At the invitation of Metropolitan Ghattas of Kuwait and Baghdad, Orthodox Church of Antioch. Archimandrite Philip and his suite visited an Antiochian parish in Erbil and met with its rector, Archpriest Abdo Najim.

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The construction of the Patriarchal complex began in 2015 with the blessing of His Holiness Catholicos-Patriarch Mar Gewargis III, now retired. He has taken a historic decision to return the seat of the

Assyrian first hierarchs to its homeland. Christianity has come into being and developed in the ancient land of Mesopotamia at the time of the Holy Apostles Thomas, Thaddeus, and Mari. Two thousand years later, the new main church of the Assyrian Church of the East was consecrated in their honour.

The main works have been completed in September 2021. That same year, His Holiness Catholicos-Patriarch Mar Awa III has been enthroned. At present, extensive work is being done for constructing a number of buildings for synodal and diocesan institutions and the main theological seminary and pilgrim centre. The plot of land and a part of financial resources for construction have been provided by the Kurdistan Regional Government.

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