



## Russian Orthodox Church delegation attends the 1st ACOE International Youth Conference



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The first in history International Youth Conference of the Assyrian Church of the East took place in Erbil and Dohuk, Iraq, on August 5-12. Attending the forum were over three hundred participants from Iraq, Syria, Lebanon, Russia, Georgia, Armenia, Iran, India, Great Britain and several countries of continental Europe, as well as from the United States, Canada, Australia and New Zealand.

His Holiness Catholicos-Patriarch Mar Awa III, the Primate of the Assyrian Church of the East, presided. His Grace Mar Awraham Youkhanis, Bishop of Western Europe and chairman of the Patriarchal Commission for International Youth Ministry, served as chief moderator. Addressing the participants were bishops and clerics of the Assyrian Church of the East from all the world, and representatives of the Community of Sant'Egidio and Pro Oriente Foundation.

Attending the conference with the blessing of His Holiness Patriarch Kirill of Moscow and All Rus' and at the invitation of the Primate of the Assyrian Church of the East was a delegation of the Moscow Patriarchate consisting of 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 (DECR) and a member of the Commission for Dialogue between the Russian Orthodox Church and the Assyrian Church of the East.

The conference programme included celebration of divine services at the places connected with the deeds of the martyrs, confessors and fathers of monasticism of the Assyrian Church of the East, as well as visits to local religious, historic and cultural sites, including the Palace of Sennacherib, the King of Assyria. Its extant buildings date back to 805-681 BC. Also, young participants met and talked with the Primate, bishops and clerics, attended lectures, workshops and cultural and entertainment events at which old Assyrian songs and dances were performed.

Members of the Russian delegation presented reports on principal directions of their church ministry. Deacon Yevgeny told the audience about various aspects of the activities of the Synodal Department for Youth Affairs and about specific features of parish life in Russia. Mr. Alferov spoke about the work of the DECR and of the Commission for Dialogue between the two Churches and also about initiatives being implemented together with the Assyrian church of Virgin Mary in Moscow as a part of "The Ancient Oriental Churches" special course offered by the DECR and the St Cyril and Methodius Theological Institute of Post-Graduate Studies.

At the closing ceremony a video "Youth Movement of the Russian Orthodox Church" prepared by the two Synodal departments was shown. Available at <https://m.youtube.com/watch?v=kKIZldwZ-xo&pp=ygVC0KHQuNC90L7QtNCw0LvRjNC90YvQuSDQvtGC0LTQtdC....>)

Discussed at the meetings with the leadership of the Assyrian Church of the East were prospects of common work with the youth including regular exchange of delegations and participation in thematic events both in Russia and in dioceses and representations of the Moscow Patriarchate abroad.

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The ACOE International Youth Conference was held with the blessing of His Holiness Catholicos-Patriarch Mar Awa III and on his own initiative. He pays special attention to the development of youth ministry on the level of parish, diocese and the whole church. The preparation has taken two years. The main purpose of the conference was the establishment of strong friendly relationships among young Assyrian faithful living all over the world and their introduction to religious traditions and culture of their ancestors. The conference was held under the motto "So that your youth is renewed like the eagle's"

from a Psalm of David (103:5).

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