



2nd St. Petersburg International Religious Forum takes place in the Northern Capital of Russia



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On September 13, the 2nd St. Petersburg International Religious Forum on 'Religious Values in the Modern World' took place in the northern capital of Russia. The event was organized by the Spiritual Administration of Muslims of St. Petersburg and the North-West Region; the Government of St. Petersburg; the Foundation for Support of Islamic Culture, Science and Education; and St. Petersburg State University with participation of the Moscow Patriarchate.

With the blessing of His Holiness Patriarch Kirill of Moscow and All Rus', a ten-member delegation of the Russian Orthodox Church took part in the event. Among the members of the delegation there were Metropolitan Varsonofy of St. Petersburg and Ladoga; Metropolitan Kirill of Kazan and Tatarstan; Bishop Gennady of Kaskelen, chancellor of the Metropolitan Area in Kazakhstan; Bishop Siluan of Petergof, rector of the St. Petersburg Theological Academy.

The forum was opened by Mufti Ravil Pancheyev, who underscored the importance of religious witness about traditional values nowadays. Greetings were read out from Alexander Drozdenko, governor of the Leningrad Region; Boris Piotrovsky, vice-governor of St. Petersburg, and Alexander Gutsan, Plenipotentiary of the President of the Russian Federation in the Northwest Federal District.

In his welcoming address, Metropolitan Varsonofy pointed out at the crucial role played by religious values for national unity and for personal life of everyone. Also, he emphasized the importance of spiritual perfection to which Christ is calling all people and added that the unchanging religious and moral values are the only reliable pillar for human beings in the rapidly changing world. 'The preservation and promotion of these values is the first and foremost task of our multinational state and national religions fulfilled for the sake of building a harmonious society based on the highest truth!'

Greetings from Metropolitan Anthony of Volokolamsk, chairman of the Moscow Patriarchate's Department for External Church Relations, was read out by his deputy, archimandrite Philaret (Bulekov). It was noted in the message that God through his prophets in the Holy Scriptures has called people to moral perfection, change of life and freedom from passions. Therefore, followers of the traditional religions must resist the destructive ideology of consumerism, selfishness and immorality. Metropolitan Anthony pointed out at a special dynamic of relationship between Russia and the Islamic world and underscored that His Holiness Patriarch Kirill of Moscow and All Rus' has supported the initiative to hold the interreligious forum in St. Petersburg.

In his address, Metropolitan Kirill of Kazan and Tatarstan spoke about the necessity of acquiring the spirit of peace for preaching the God-given spiritual and moral guidelines by good deeds and pointed to the Republic of Tatarstan where churches stand side by side with mosques as an example of good relationships among followers of the traditional religions working together for the good of the neighbors.

Bishop Gennady shared his experience of interreligious cooperation in Kazakhstan where Congresses of the Leaders of World and Traditional Religions have been held for more than twenty years. Also, he presented an analysis of human relations from the perspective of the Church Fathers, philosophers and theologians.

The forum completed its work by reading a final draft document.

On September 14, the Bayazet Readings were held at the Department of History of St. Petersburg State University on the topic of "Theology as a Language of Interfaith and Interethnic Dialogue." Professor Dmitry Shmonin, director of the Institute of Theology of the University, served as moderator. Numerous greetings were read out and many reports were presented. Bishop Gennady spoke about the

origin of extremism from the perspective of human psychology.

At the end of the meeting, there was signed an agreement on cooperation between the Spiritual Administration of Muslims of St. Petersburg and Al-Mustafa International University.

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