



DECR secretary takes part in meetings of Working Group and Secretariat of the Congress of the Leaders of World and Traditional Religions



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On 7th – 8th October 2024, the Working Group and the Secretariat of the Congress of the Leaders of World and Traditional Religions held their sessions in the capital of Kazakhstan, Astana. With the blessing of Metropolitan Anthony of Volokolamsk, Chairman of the Moscow Patriarchate's Department for External Church Relations, taking part in the meetings was Priest Iliya Kashitsyn, DECR Secretary for Interreligious Relations.

On 7th October, members of the Working Group and the Secretariat met in the Palace of Peace and Reconciliation in Astana to discuss implementation of the Development Concept of the Congress of the Leaders of World and Traditional Religions, as well as the Regulation on the Status of the Congress

Goodwill Ambassador and the Ambassador nominees, the upcoming First Forum of Young Religious Leaders, and key topics and dates of the VIII Congress of the Leaders of World and Traditional Religions scheduled for 2025. Taking part in the session were Christian, Muslim, Buddhist and Hindu religious leaders from Russia, Kazakhstan, Iran, India, Great Britain, Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Pakistan and the Republic of Korea, as well as the Kazakh statespersons and senior representatives of the N. Nazarbayev Center for Development of Interfaith and Intercivilization Dialogue.

That same day, Rev. Iliya Kashitsyn and Dr Rudraksha Sakrikar, professor of the Somaya Vidyavihar University (India), addressed students and faculty of the Nazarbayev University in Astana – one of the leading academic institutions in Kazakhstan. In their speeches, they dwelt on various aspects of interfaith dialogue and the work of the Congress of the Leaders of World and Traditional Religions.

On 8th October, the Congress Secretariat held its XXII session. Taking part in the meeting were: Mr Maulen Ashimbayev, Chairman of the Senate of the Kazakh Parliament; Ms Aida Balayeva, Minister of Culture and Information of the Republic of Kazakhstan; Mr Akan Rakhmetullin, First Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Kazakhstan; Archbishop Nektarios of Anthedona (Orthodox Patriarchate of Jerusalem); Bishop Gennady of Kaskelen, Chancellor of the Moscow Patriarchate's Metropolitan District in Kazakhstan; Archpriest Dmitry Baydek, sacristan of the Holy Dormition Cathedral in Astana; Monsignor Khaled Akasheh, Bureau Chief for Islam of the Dicastery for Interreligious Dialogue of the Roman Catholic Church; Mr Mohamed Abdelsalam, Secretary General of the Muslim Council of Elders; Mr Abdelrahman Moussa, Head of the Office of Sheikh Al-Azhar; Archbishop Emeritus Yuriy Novgorodov of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in the Republic of Kazakhstan; Mr Zheng Ci, Vice President of the Association of Buddhists of China; Dr Abdel Aziz bin Ahmad Sarhan, Special Envoy of the World Islamic League; Mr Jeyhun Rustamov, Representative of the Chairman of the Caucasus Muslims Board; Ms Dianna Yessenova, Acting Chairman of the Board of the N. Nazarbayev Center for Development of Interfaith and Intercivilization Dialogue; Mr Bulat Sarsenbayev, Advisor to the Chairman of the Board of the N. Nazarbayev Center; Dr Ali Akbar Ziaei, Head of the Center for Interreligious Dialogue of the Islamic Culture and Relations Organization of Iran; as well as other representatives of Christian confessions and Muslim, Buddhist, Jewish and Hindu religious communities from Kazakhstan, Pakistan, India, Egypt, the UAE, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Israel, China, Japan, the Republic of Korea, Thailand and Mongolia; along with high-ranking officials, diplomats, scholars and volunteers.

In his speech delivered at the meeting, the DECR representative pointed out that interfaith dialogue had become especially important in the face of ongoing degradation of the international law and religious freedom, amid conflicts and manifestations of intolerance. As the speaker emphasized, in the current circumstances, the experience the Congress has gained over the decades of its work is particularly valuable. Rev. Iliya Kashitsyn spoke in support of the implementation of the Congress's resolutions and

tasks, such as spreading the ideas of dialogue through the agency of the Goodwill Ambassadors, working with youth and educational institutions and fostering a culture of good interfaith and interethnic relations in society.

The participants in the meeting approved the Regulation on the Status of the Congress Goodwill Ambassador, elected the nominated Goodwill Ambassadors and discussed the upcoming First Forum of Young Religious Leaders due to begin its work in Astana on 9th October 2024. They also approved key topics for the VIII Congress of the Leaders of World and Traditional Religions scheduled for 2025 and exchanged views on the progress in interfaith cooperation in the world.

The meeting was followed by a ceremony during which the Congress Goodwill Ambassadors were appointed and Medals of Honour of the Congress of the Leaders of World and Traditional Religions were awarded. Priest Iliya Kashitsyn was among those who were presented with the Medal of Honour by a decree of President of Kazakhstan Kassym-Jomart Kemeluly Tokayev. Later, a reception for the participants in the meeting was given on behalf of the Chairman of the Kazakh Senate.

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