



Assyrian Patriarch meets with the head of St. Petersburg Metropolitanate and the Governor of St. Petersburg



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On June 2, a delegation of the Assyrian Church of the East headed by His Holiness Catholicos-Patriarch Mar Awa III currently on an official visit to Russia, arrived in St. Petersburg.

The distinguished guests were met at the Moscow railway station by Metropolitan Varsonofy of St. Petersburg and Ladoga, Mr. Ivan N. Sudosa, head of the Protocol Department of the Diocese of St. Petersburg, and the clergy.

Accompanied by Metropolitan Varsonofy, members of the delegation proceeded to the Resurrection Novodevichy Convent, the place of their accommodation in the northern capital.

On the same day, His Holiness Catholicos-Patriarch Mar Awa III met with the head of the St. Petersburg Metropolitanate at the metropolitan's residence in the Novodevichy Convent. The meeting was attended by Mr. Alexander D. Beglov, the Governor of St. Petersburg, and representatives of the city administration.

Mr. Beglov warmly welcomed the Primate of the Assyrian Church of the East and emphasized the particular importance of his visit to the northern capital, saying, "Your Holiness, the ties between our fraternal Churches have a centuries-long history. Our peoples have always supported each other. We treasure grateful memories of the Assyrians, including your direct ancestors, who fought on the Russian Empire's side during the First World War. We do remember that during the Great Patriotic War representatives of the Assyrian people, together with all citizens of the USSR, were off at the front and courageously defended our Motherland. Among them were three generals, and several soldiers were awarded the highest military title of the Hero of the Soviet Union. At present, our relations are developing in a spirit of remarkable mutual understanding. This is evidenced by the top assessment of your activity by His Holiness Patriarch Kirill of Moscow and All Rus' and President Vladimir Putin of the Russian Federation. Our Christian faith and our adherence to the traditions bequeathed to us by our ancestors have always been our backbone."

The head of the region noted the important part being played by the St. Petersburg Assyrian community in the life of the city. He said, "In the late 20s – early 30s of the last century, the Assyrian community of Leningrad numbered about two thousand people, and the Hayadta Assyrian society was formed. National schools, sections, and a club were opened. The Herzen Pedagogical Institute held a training course for teachers for Assyrian children. National literature and a newspaper were published. St. Petersburg remembers the outstanding philologist Mikhail Sado, the famous restorer of the Russian Museum Anany Brindarov, a master of sport in freestyle wrestling Viktor Zayaev. Today, we have a great honour to welcome Your Holiness, the head of the Assyrian Christian people, on the hospitable Neva land."

Bishop Varsonofy added, "On behalf of His Holiness Patriarch Kirill of Moscow and All Rus' and the entire Russian Orthodox Church, allow me to express our feeling of love to Your Holiness and the Assyrian Christian in your care. Our Governor very accurately noted that you are our fraternal Church and fraternal people. The foundation of our unbreakable brotherhood is the Lord Jesus Christ, to whom we remain faithful in these difficult times for both Russia and the entire world."

His Holiness Catholicos-Patriarch Mar Awa III said: "I thank Your Excellency and Your Eminence for the warm cordial welcome. I am glad to come to this beautiful city, where the honour and glory of the Russian state live. A little over a hundred years ago, certain events took place here and decisions were taken directly related to the history of the Assyrian people. At that time, under the protection of Great

Russia, we together put up resistance to fearsome enemies. As a matter of fact, we confront the same foes today, as the outer forms are changing shape, but the inner content remains the same. St. Paul the Apostle expressed this in unequivocal language in his Letter to the Ephesians, "For we are not contending against flesh and blood, but against the principalities, against the power, against the world rulers of the present darkness, against the spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places"(Eph.6:12). It is these fallen spirits that direct the forces, which do evil and violate justice, destroying Christian shrines in Ukraine and doing the same in the West though not so obviously. These spirits have maliciously turned against Russia, for Russia stands for the cause of peace, for justice, and the candid heavenly truth. God is in this truth, as the holy Prince Alexander Nevsky, the heavenly patron of St. Petersburg, said eight centuries ago. May the blessings of God be upon Holy Russia till the end of time."

In conclusion, the parties exchanged souvenirs.

Attending the meeting were members of the delegation of the Assyrian Church of the East: His Grace Mar Afram Athneil, Metropolitan of Syria; His Grace Mar Narsai Benjamin, Bishop of Iran, Armenia and Georgia; Chorebishop Samano Odisho, rector of the Assyrian church of the Blessed Virgin Mary in Moscow and representative of the Assyrian Church of the East in Russia; and deacon Roland Bijamov, representative of the Assyrian community in Moscow.

The Moscow Patriarchate was represented by Bishop Kliment of Krasnoslobodsk and Temnikov, co-chair of the Commission for Dialogue between the Russian Orthodox Church and the Assyrian Church of the East, and Mr. Sergei G. Alferov, a DECR staff member.

His Holiness Catholicos-Patriarch Mar Ava III and his suite will stay in the St. Petersburg Metropolitanate till June 5.

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