



DECR Chairman heads round table on cooperation between the Russian Orthodox Church and Compatriots living in Africa and the Middle East



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On November 20–21, 2025, a round table entitled “The Russian Orthodox Church and Compatriots: Experience of Cooperation in the Countries of Africa and the Middle East” was held in Sharjah (UAE). By the blessing of His Holiness Patriarch Kirill of Moscow and all Rus’, the meeting was chaired by Metropolitan Anthony of Volokolamsk, Chairman of the Department for External Church Relations of the Moscow Patriarchate.

The forum was jointly organized by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation and the Department for External Church Relations of the Moscow Patriarchate, with the support of the Department for External Economic and International Relations of the City of Moscow.

Hierarchs, clergy, and laity of the Russian Orthodox Church, as well as representatives of Russian compatriot organizations from Africa and the Middle East, came to the UAE to take part in the meeting. Among them were Metropolitan Konstantine of Cairo and North Africa, Patriarchal Exarch of Africa, and Bishop Euthymius of Lukhovitsy, Vicar of the Patriarchal Exarchate of Africa.

The church delegation accompanying the DECR Chairman included Archpriest Igor Vyzhanov, DECR Deputy Chairman; Archpriest Sergiy Zvonarev, Secretary for the affairs of the far abroad; Hieromonk Kirill (Peregudin), staff member of the DECR Secretariat for the affairs of the far abroad; and Priest Alexander Ershov, assistant to the DECR Chairman.

Among the participants were also representatives of compatriot public organizations and Russian diplomats.

Before the beginning of the round table, Metropolitan Anthony of Volokolamsk, Metropolitan Konstantine of Cairo and North Africa, and Bishop Euthymius of Lukhovitsy, together with other participants, celebrated a moleben before the beginning of any good work in the Church of the Holy Apostle Philip in Sharjah.

The session was opened by the DECR Chairman, who conveyed to those present the blessing of His Holiness Patriarch Kirill of Moscow and all Rus'.

Noting that this conference was already the thirteenth in the series (previous meetings of similar focus, held as part of a joint initiative launched in 2009 by the DECR and the Department for Compatriots of the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, had taken place in Brussels, Buenos Aires, Beijing, San Francisco, Johannesburg, Rome, Berlin, Rabat, Seoul, Budapest, and Bangkok), Metropolitan Anthony of Volokolamsk emphasized that such events consistently receive positive responses from clergy and compatriots living abroad. The meetings foster communication between pastors and laity from different countries and provide opportunities for sharing parish life experience.

His Eminence spoke about the work of the Department for External Church Relations in coordinating the activities of the Moscow Patriarchate's parishes abroad, as well as its efforts to support and interact with compatriots living outside Russia. Special attention was given to the ministry of the Russian Church on the African continent and to the life of the Moscow Patriarchate's parishes in the Middle East, a region torn by numerous long-standing conflicts, the unhealed wounds of which threaten the lives and stability of both the local population and Russian compatriots and Orthodox communities.

As the archpastor noted, the Russian Church's main concern for compatriots who, by the will of fate, find themselves far from their homeland, lies in the preservation and strengthening of their faith, pastoral

care, spiritual comfort, and organization of mutual assistance. It is well known that church communities abroad become for them natural centers of spiritual and cultural life, helping compatriots to integrate organically into the social environment of their host countries while preserving their spiritual and cultural identity.

“During this meeting, we must reflect on what we all can do together to strengthen faith and the best qualities in people. Undoubtedly, our priority is to ensure regular pastoral care of our compatriots and the celebration of divine services. It seems necessary to further develop the accumulated experience and achievements in supporting compatriots, as well as various forms of assistance for the social adaptation of our brothers and sisters abroad. We should encourage in every possible way the active participation of young compatriots in humanitarian initiatives and in the cultural and educational projects organized by parishes. I hope we will also discuss the problems and challenges faced by clergy and compatriots, seek ways to solve them, and outline new directions for our cooperation in the countries of the Middle East and Africa,” said Metropolitan Anthony of Volokolamsk, wishing the hierarchs and clergy God’s help in their responsible ministry carried out in difficult conditions far from their homeland, as they help compatriots preserve the faith of their forefathers, their spiritual traditions, and their culture.

During the sessions, speeches were also delivered by: T.F. Zabiroy, Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of the Russian Federation to the United Arab Emirates; Metropolitan Konstantine of Cairo and North Africa, Patriarchal Exarch of Africa; Bishop Euthymius of Lukhovitsy, Vicar of the Patriarchal Exarchate of Africa; G.A. Ovechko, Director of the Department for Compatriots Abroad of the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs; M.M. Melekh, Special Representative of the Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation for International Cooperation on the Protection of Freedom of Religion; M.V. Drozdov, Chairman of the World Coordinating Council of Russian Compatriots Living Abroad; I.P. Tkach, Deputy Head of the Department for External Economic and International Relations of the City of Moscow; Archimandrite Alexander (Zarkeshev), Rector of the Church of the Holy Apostle Philip in Sharjah (UAE); Archimandrite Philip (Vasil’tsev), Representative of the Patriarch of Moscow and all Rus’ to the Patriarch of Antioch; Archimandrite Vassian (Zmeev), Head of the Russian Ecclesiastical Mission in Jerusalem; Archpriest Daniil Lugovoy, Rector of St. Sergius Cathedral of the South African Diocese in Johannesburg (South Africa); Archpriest Dmitry Netsvetaev, Rector of the Church of the Resurrection of Christ in Tunis; Archpriest Pavel Povalyaev, Rector of the Church of St. Nicholas the Wonderworker in Limassol (Cyprus); Archpriest Alexiy Mashkov, Rector of the Parish of the Holy Myrrh-Bearing Women in Hurgada (Egypt); Archpriest Maxim Massalitin, Rector of the Church of the Resurrection in Rabat, capital of Morocco; Priest Georgy Sergeev, responsible for the pastoral care of the Moscow Patriarchate’s faithful in the Republic of Turkey; Hieromonk Pallady (Bystrov), ministering to the community of the Russian Orthodox Church at the Akkuyu nuclear power plant (Turkey); E.G. Tarilova, Chair of the Coordinating Council of Russian Compatriot Organizations in the UAE.

Over the course of the two-day forum, participants engaged in a fruitful exchange of views on ways to develop cooperation between the Church, the state, and compatriot organizations. The participants of the round table noted the positive experience of parish communities' social service in the regions of Africa and the Middle East. The importance of strengthening ties between the Moscow Patriarchate's parishes abroad and Russian compatriot organizations, including national coordinating councils of compatriot organizations, was emphasized.

Concluding the meeting, Metropolitan Anthony expressed his hope that the results of the discussions would be applied in the pastoral, social, and educational work of the Moscow Patriarchate's institutions in the Middle East and Africa.

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