



## Head of Syriac Orthodox Church arrives in Russia



On 9 November 2015, the Primate of the Syriac Orthodox Church, His Holiness Patriarch Mor Ignatius Aphrem II, arrived in Russia on an official visit at the invitation of His Holiness Patriarch Kirill of Moscow and All Russia. It is the first visit of His Holiness Patriarch Ignatius Aphrem II to the Russian Orthodox Church since his election to the Patriarchal Throne in March 2014.

The delegation accompanying the Primate of the Syriac Orthodox Church includes Mor Severius Hawa, Metropolitan of Baghdad and Basra; Metropolitan Mor Dionysius Jean Kawak, Patriarchal Assistant, Director of the Department of Ecumenical Relations of the Syriac Orthodox Church; Archbishop Mor Philoxenus Yusuf Cetin, Patriarchal Vicar in Istanbul and Ankara; Mor Nicodemus Daoud Sharaf, Archbishop of Mosul; Archimandrite Raban Roger-Youssef Akhrass, Director of the Syriac Studies Department; and Archimandrite Raban Joseph Bali, Patriarchal Secretary and Syriac Media Office Director.

At the Moscow Sheremetyevo Airport His Holiness Patriarch Mor Ignatius Aphrem II was met by Metropolitan Hilarion of Volokolamsk, chairman of the Department for External Church Relations of the Moscow Patriarchate, who greeted the high guest on behalf of the Russian Orthodox Church.

Among those who took part in the meeting were also Archbishop Ezras Nersisyan, head of the Russian and Nor Nakhichevan diocese of the Armenian Apostolic Church; Co-bishop Samano Odisho, rector of the Assyrian church of St. Mary in Moscow; Hieromonk Stefan (Igumnov), DECR Secretary for Inter-Christian Relations; and DECR staff members, Mr. Yevgeny Novozhenin, Mr. Sergey Alferov, Mr. Denis Baturin, and Mr. Vladimir Kuznetsov.

During the visit which will be completed on November 13, His Holiness Patriarch Mor Ignatius Aphrem II will meet with His Holiness Patriarch Kirill of Moscow and All Russia and representatives of governmental authorities of the Russian Federation, and will visit theological institutions of the Russian Orthodox Church and churches and monasteries in Moscow and the Moscow Region.

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The Syriac Orthodox Church belongs to the family of the so-called “Non-Chalcedonian” Churches, along with the Coptic, Apostolic Armenian, Ethiopian and Eritrean Tewahedo Churches. It is one of traditional Christian communities of the Middle East and numbers one and a half – two million faithful. The canonical territory of the Syriac Orthodox Church comprises Syria, Iraq, Lebanon, and the south of Turkey. Historically, this Church is closely linked to the Malankara Syrian Church performing its ministry in India.

In the 20<sup>th</sup> century, a considerable number of the Syriac Orthodox Church’s faithful in the Middle East were forced to leave their homeland and flee to the Western countries because of the worsening of the social and political situation in the region. In recent years this tendency has grown with terror spreading in Syria and Iraq. Clergymen often fall victims of the terrorists’ attacks. Thus, abducted in April 2013 were two metropolitans of Aleppo. One of them, Mar Gregorios Yohanna Ibrahim, is a hierarch of the Syriac Orthodox Church. There is still no information about the whereabouts of the two metropolitans.

*DECR Communication Service*

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