



Participants Interreligious Peace Forum Moscow | 14.11.2000

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Religious leaders, public figures and scholars from Russia and other countries in the Commonwealth of Independent States make an appeal to all people and nations to take the paths of peace.

Social reality has become ever more complex today. The moral crisis and the growth of crime, hostility, violence, and vice pose challenges to the traditional spiritual and moral values. The rapid secularization that compels people to exclude religious motivation from socially significant relations and actions stands in clear contradiction to the aspiration of believers to build an earthly existence in accordance with the higher truth. Economic and political processes are characterized by a trend toward internationalization and globalization which requires a new reflection on the role of ethnic identity and religion in the life of the global human family.

Overcoming enmity in the world and rejecting interreligious conflicts can be achieved primarily through dialogue, mutual understanding and cooperation in actions that are beneficial to the individual, society and state. We testify that followers of the traditional religions in our country are fully determined to support fellowship and cooperation. We are moved to this by the tradition of a centuries-long peaceful coexistence among the adherents of Orthodoxy, Islam, Judaism and Buddhism in the space where we live today. We also have had a good experience of cooperation in the 20th century, which includes relations with other Christian confessions.

We are convinced that peace cannot be achieved without genuine moral transformation and renewal of society. Harmony among people of various nations and faiths will become lasting only if faithfulness to the time-honored moral standards, which have been given from above and upon which any human activity should be based, prevails among our fellow countrymen. People cannot be made happy by economic prosperity nor restrictive measures, nor the calls of radicals, nor the cult of consumerism and pleasure. Only a regeneration of the moral principle in the soul of the individual and in the life of society will help to overcome divisions, disorders, enmity and hate.

Aware the growing danger of conflict between the secular world view and adherence to the integral religious manner of life, we call people to exert all possible efforts to harmonize the existing legal systems and the religious and moral traditions of various peoples. To achieve this it is necessary to develop a broad dialogue of the legislative and executive authorities, religious leaders, scholars and representatives of various social forces.

We are seriously disturbed by acts of vandalism to sacred places, manifestations of xenophobia and sacrilege, propaganda of prejudicial attitudes toward religion and public actions that offend the feelings of believers. Such actions not only belittle the dignity of citizens but also enkindle interreligious enmity, bring schism into society and lead to the destabilization of the situation, which is especially dangerous in regions of conflict. We support the freedom of speech and the press and reject censorship, which, however, does not relieve of responsibility those who blaspheme against what is sacred for millions of our fellow countrymen. Recalling this, the participants in the forum

appeal to organs of state power to strengthen measures against vandalism and sacrilege so as to protect the legitimate rights of believing citizens. We also call upon journalists and public figures to recognize fully the significance of every spoken word, for it can often intensify hostility, but at the same time can bring truth and reconciliation.

Without surrendering our right and obligation to make moral judgments about the actions of the authorities, religious leaders welcome the development of cooperation between their communities and the state in various spheres. One of the continuing areas of such joint actions has been peacemaking both within each country and on the European, Asian and world scale. We fully support efforts of the state to assert tolerance, to promote interreligious, interethnic, and cross-cultural dialogue and to oppose extremism and terrorism. We decisively condemn forcible conversion of anybody to another faith.

Today believers cannot shut themselves up within the confines of a single country. In the situation of globalization we need to have an impact upon public opinion and promote the adoption of well-considered decisions that determine the fate of humanity. Therefore we consider it extremely important to promote integration processes within the borders of the CIS and the development of our dialogue with European and global intergovernmental structures. We are open to the strengthening of mutual ties and cooperation with international interreligious organizations.

We hope that the religious communities, the state and the civil society structures will manage by their joint efforts to direct the nations onto the path of harmony, mercy and justice.

Statement

of the Participants in the Interreligious Peace Forum regarding Current Conflicts in the North Caucasus and Central Asia

We, participants in the Interreligious Peace Forum — spiritual leaders of Christianity, Islam, Buddhism and Judaism — are profoundly disturbed by the manifestations of extremism and terrorism which some often try to justify by religious rhetoric.

In the expanse of Eurasia, adherents of the traditional religions have lived in peace and cooperation for centuries. However the end of the 20th century has been marked by events that evoke sharp pain in the hearts of believers, regardless of their particular faith. The history of our countries in the outgoing decade has been marked by many bloody interethnic and civil conflicts, unprecedented intensification of ethnic, political and social enmity, xenophobia and alienation. We are especially alarmed by attempts to misuse the feelings of believers for achieving political and even criminal ends and intensifying disputes and conflicts. It is impossible, indeed, to overcome injustice by anarchy and to quench internecine war by still greater hostility.

Without doubt believers have the right to build their own lives in accordance with their own faith. The government, society and the mass media should respect the feelings and way of life of adherents of the traditional religions, both the majority of the population and the minorities. But nobody should be permitted to take the lives of other people or to infringe upon their rights and liberties using words of faith as a cover. We testify with conviction: no traditional religion teaches this. On the contrary, sinful are actions that we have witnessed in the recent past, such as kidnapping and banishment of people, dispossession of their homes and property and attempts to convert people to another faith by force.

People in the North Caucasus and the Central Asian regions have seen the appearance of a real danger that choices alien to them will be imposed on them. Immediately across the southern borders of the Commonwealth of Independent States, law and order have been weakened and drug

trafficking has flourished along with the uncontrolled proliferation of weapons and other forms of criminality. This is an indisputable and tragic fact of international life, recognized by the world community and reflected in decisions of the United Nations.

Unfortunately, these developments have spread to the territory of the CIS countries, not without evil intent. Emissaries of militant movements from various states have penetrated here, using the symbols of Islam for their own self-interests and trying to change radically the historical road of the CIS nations and their traditional way of life. All of this has been accompanied by the creation of illegal armed formations, crude interference from abroad in the affairs of sovereign states and the creation of new centers of tension. All this has often led to the mass destruction of innocent people. The territory being hurt by this disease is expanding relentlessly. Terrorism has taken on an international character and thus its centers are threatening the stability of the whole world.

We honestly confess that the historical religious traditions have sometimes justified the use of force for instituting and establishing faith. However today, in the situation of fragility in peaceful human coexistence, we call upon believers to renew the peacemaking potential of religious ideals and values. May wise moderation, peacemaking tolerance and fraternal love help us to step back from this dangerous line. We declare that terrorism and unjust force, by whatever means they may be justified, should be unconditionally and consistently eradicated. The world community should give a resolute rebuff to these criminal manifestations. Religious extremism must be counteracted by education, dialogue and support for the creative efforts of believers.

At the end of the 20th century it depends to a great extent on the efforts of believers whether the new millennium will be free from injustice and deprivation, hatred and hostility, moral decline and fratricidal conflicts. Let us ardently pray and tirelessly work for the sake of asserting peace and harmony in our countries.

D. B. Ayushev, Bandito Khambo Lama, Chairman of the Buddhist Traditional Sangha in Russia;

Mufti R. Gainutdin, Chairman of the Moslem Board in European Russia, Chairman of the Council of Muftis in Russia;

Kirill, Metropolitan of Smolensk and Kaliningrad, Chairman of the Department for External Church Relations of the Moscow Patriarchate, permanent member of the Holy Synod of the Russian pe sodox Church;

Rev. I. Kovalevsky, Chancellor of the Apostolic Administration for the Latin Rite Catholics in Northern European Russia;

Senior Pastor P. Konovalchik, Chairman of the Russian Union of Evangelical Christians-Baptists;

P. B. Lazar, Chief Rabbi of Russia;

V. S. Pudov, Head of the Representation of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Russia in Moscow;

T. Tajuddin, Chairman (Supreme Mufti Sheik-ul-Islam) of the Central Moslem Board in Russia;

A. S. Shaevich, Chairman of the Congress of Jewish Religious Organizations and Associations in Russia.

Signed by the above spiritual leaders of Christianity, Islam, Buddhism and Judaism, November 11, 2000, and adopted by the participants in the Interreligious Peace Forum, Moscow, November 13-14, 2000

