

**Fourth Session of the Commission for Bilateral Dialogue  
Between the Russian Orthodox Church and the Assyrian Church of the East**

**Thrissur (Kerala State, Republic of India), 13 – 15 November, 2019**

*Joint Communiqué*

From November 13 to November 15, 2019 with the blessings of His Holiness Catholicos-Patriarch Mar Gewargis III and His Holiness Patriarch Kirill of Moscow and all Russia, the fourth session of the Commission for Bilateral Dialogue between the Russian Orthodox Church and the Assyrian Church of the East took place in Thrissur, Kerala State, Republic of India. The meeting concluded in the agreement and adoption of the present communiqué.

Having analyzed the results of the Commission labors over the past year, the meeting participants noted with satisfaction the achievements and outlined further prospects for fruitful cooperation, namely, in the framework of the implementation of joint initiatives in the academic and humanitarian fields, as well as through youth contacts and the implementation of joint initiatives in the media sphere.

The Commission appreciates the current study program of Rev. Priest Addai Daniel, who began studying at the Moscow Theological Academy in 2018 as the first student of the Assyrian Church of the East studying at an institution of the Russian Orthodox Church. He is not only successful in his studies, but also takes initiative in building bridges and understanding between the two Churches. One of his initiatives was a joint pilgrimage to Iran of Priest Addai and a Russian Orthodox colleague from Moscow Theological Academy from 25 July to 10 August, 2019. During this pilgrimage they visited ancient Assyrian churches in the cities and villages of Urmia, Tehran, and Tabriz as well as local libraries where they studied valuable Syriac manuscripts. The trip included meetings with His Grace Mar Narsai (Benjamin), Bishop of Iran as well as local clergy and believers.

In this regard, the Commission confirms its intention to assist in admitting 1-2 new Assyrian students to the higher educational institutions of the Moscow Patriarchate in the near academic year 2020–2021. The Commission hopes to have a student from the Assyrian community in Russia as well as one from the global Assyrian Church of the East.

The practice of inviting Assyrian delegates to participate in different theological and pastoral conferences of the Russian Orthodox Church shall be continued. In the future, it is planned to send appropriate invitations to Russian delegates also, including to the educational institutions of the Assyrian Church of the East in India and Australia. An important event in this direction was our second colloquium, organized on November 14, 2019 in the Theological Seminary of Thrissur, which focused on the history, modern life and services of the Russian Orthodox Church.

The Commission recognizes the importance of organizing regular theological

consultations in order to determine the range of relevant issues in the relationship between the two Churches. Among these issues are both theological (scientific) topics as well as pastoral (practical and moral) concerns.

The Commission agreed to organize a second Summer Institute to take place during 2021. Additionally, the Commission proposes a new initiative in the framework of our dialogue to be comprised of exchange and collaboration of youth delegations. In this regard, the Russian side intends to invite a group of Assyrian youth to take part in the next International Youth Congress of the Russian Orthodox Church in the summer of 2020. In its turn, the Assyrian Church confirms its readiness to receive several Russian representatives at the first International Youth Congress of the Assyrian Church of the East, also planned for July 2020, in Erbil (KRG), Iraq.

The Commission welcomes the ongoing development of inter-Christian interaction with the aim of providing humanitarian assistance to the Christian communities of Iraq and Syria, and the implementation of specialized projects to restore desecrated shrines and destroyed social infrastructure in these countries. Recognizing the leading role of the Working Group for the Aid to the Population of Syria of the Council for Cooperation with Religious Associations under the President of the Russian Federation in this good endeavor, an intention was declared to work out future forms of constructive cooperation between the Russian Orthodox Church and the Assyrian community of Iraq, including contacts through the ACERO. The valuable consultations received following the visit of the delegation of the Council of Christian Churches of Iraq to Russia, including His Grace Mar Abris Youhanna, Bishop of Erbil (November 21-28, 2018) will also contribute to this. The same applies to the meaningful meeting of His Eminence Metropolitan Hilarion of Volokolamsk with His Grace Mar Ishaq Yousip, Bishop of Nohadra, Mosul and the CIS countries (Moscow, June, 20, 2019).

The Commission highlighted two areas of profound concern in the life of Christianity in the East. First is the anti-Christian violence that threatens the lives of many clergy and believers of the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church. Secondly, is the deterioration of unity and Christian solidarity caused by the sad situation in Ukraine and subsequent events. As a commission, we call for furtherance of good will in response to these tragic situations. We continue to pray for the violent tragedy befalling Christians of the Middle East, Iraq and Syria in particular.

The parties warmly thank personally His Eminence Mar Aprem Mooken, Metropolitan of India and the whole local community of the Assyrian Church of the East for the cordial hospitality extended.

The results of this fourth Commission's session will be presented to the Holy Synods of the Assyrian Church of the East and the Russian Orthodox Church for their consideration and final approval.

The next session is planned to be organized and take place during the Fall of 2020 in Saransk, Metropolia of Mordovia, Moscow Patriarchate. As this will be the fifth and

jubilee meeting of the Commission, it is planned to schedule a Joint Conference, a concert of Assyrian and Russian ecclesiastical music, and a photo exhibition on the development of the close relationship formed in dialogue between the Russian Orthodox and Assyrian Church of the East (focusing on the recent period of the late 1990s to today).

15 November 2019