



International peace meeting of religious leaders in Munich

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An international meeting under the theme 'Bound to Live Together. Religions and Cultures in Dialogue' was held from September 11 to 13, 2011, in Munich, Germany. It was organized together by the Community of St. Egidio and the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Munich and Freising.

With the blessing of His Holiness Patriarch Kirill of Moscow and All Russia, the meeting was attended by Metropolitan Filaret of Minsk and Slutsk, Patriarchal Exarch for All Belarus, Metropolitan Alexander of Astana and Kazakhstan, Bishop Ilary of Makarovo, vicar of the diocese of Kiev, and Deacon Alexy Dikarev of the Department for External Church Relations, Moscow Patriarchate.

The forum of religious leaders, which is organized by the Community of St. Egidio under the general name 'Prayer for Peace' annually since the meeting in Assisi in 1986, united high-ranking representatives of the Roman Catholic Church, Local Orthodox Churches, other Christian Churches and communities and major world religions. Among over 300 delegates were Patriarch Daniel of Romania, Metropolitan Emmanuil of France, president of the Conference of European Churches (Patriarchate of Constantinople), Cardinal Kurt Koch, president of the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity, Cardinal Reinhard Marx, Archbishop of Munich and Freising, Cardinal Cresencio Sepe, Archbishop of Naples, Cardinal Roger Etchegarai, vice-dean of the College of Cardinals, Greek-Melkite Patriarch Gregory III, Coptic Catholic Patriarch Cardinal Antonios Naguib, Syriac Catholic Patriarch Mar Ignatios Joseph III, Lutheran World Federation president Munib Younan, Rev. Nikolaus Schneider, president of the Council of the Evangelical Church in German, Russia's Chief Rabbi Berel Lazar, Palestinian Autonomy minister for religious affairs Mahmoud al-Habash, and others.

The forum opened on September 11 with the solemn mass celebrated in the presence of representatives of other Christian Churches by Cardinal Marx assisted by numerous clergy. In conclusion, Metropolitan Filaret thanked the Community of St. Egidio and its founder Prof. Andrea Riccardi on behalf of the Russian Orthodox Church for the organization of the meeting and wished its participants fruitful work.

Later that day, a commemoration of September 11th, 2001, took place in one of the city squares with the participation of German President Christian Wulff, to honour the memory of the victims of the tragedy in New York and Washington.

The official opening of the forum took place in the evening at the former residence of Bavarian kings. Before it began, President C. Wulff had a brief meeting with some representatives of Christian Churches and other religions. Among those invited were Patriarch Daniel of Romania and Metropolitan Alexander of Kazakhstan. The positive experience of Germany as an example of peaceful coexistence of different religions and cultures was pointed out.

On September 12, the forum worked in numerous sections dealing with topical theological and socio-political themes. Metropolitan Filaret spoke at the round-table conference on Christian Unity, Love for the Poor. The plenary session in the afternoon was addressed by Chancellor Angela Merkel. She stressed the importance of religion in the efforts to achieve peace and justice and the significance of the religious dimension in Europe's public life.

On September 13, the participants visited the Dachau concentration camp near Munich. Cardinal Roger Etchegarai opened the commemoration ceremony, mentioning the names of the clergy of various Christian traditions who died there. Metropolitan Alexander of Kazakhstan said the office for the dead at the Russian Orthodox chapel built in the territory of the former concentration camp.

In the evening of that day, a Christian prayer for peace was said at the city cathedral. Metropolitan Filaret delivered a sermon on Jn. 14:25-31. After that the participants walked in a march to the Marienplatz Square in downtown Munich for the closing ceremony, which centered on the signing of a peace appeal.

The 2012 Prayer for Peace will be held in Sarajevo, the capital of Bosnia and Herzegovina. It will be the first to be organized together by the Catholic and Muslim communities.

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