



Metropolitan Hilarion of Volokolamsk speaks at interreligious conference in Hungary

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DECR Chairman Metropolitan Hilarion of Volokolamsk arrived in Hungary on June 1, 2011, to participate, with the blessing of His Holiness Patriarch Kirill of Moscow and All Russia, in an international conference on cooperation between Christianity, Islam and Judaism.

The conference was initiated and organized by the Hungarian Government. It gathered Christian, Islamic and Jewish leaders, Hungarian statesmen, ambassadors and representatives of international organizations. It was opened on June 2 at the Royal Godollo palace near Budapest.

Opening the conference, Hungary's Deputy Prime Minister Zsolt Semjen welcomed the participants on behalf of the Hungarian Government. He expressed the conviction that the principle of state neutrality towards religious confessions should imply the promotion of secular values alone by the state. He said that 'the separation of church and state sealed in the Constitutions of democratic states does not at all mean that the Church is separated from society' and that 'the task of the state is to create a basis for meaningful inter-confessional dialogue in ensuring the religious freedom of citizens to openly confess their beliefs'.

Minister of State for religious affairs Laszlo Szaszfalvi in his speech stressed that 'religious freedom lies in the basis of European values'. The European government is responsible for ensuring a possibility for traditional religious confessions to openly state their positions and to participate actively in the life of Europe today. He said that 'Europe today is called to develop a system of social justice in which the religious diversity allows to solve problems rather than to create new ones'

Metropolitan Hilarion addressed the theme 'The problem of religious intolerance. What can we do together?' He emphasized the relevance of the conference due to the aggravating problem of discriminations against Christians in the world. 'Now as never before it is important to enter into intensive interreligious dialogue for enabling each community to bear witness to its faith and tradition and to strengthen good-neighbourly relations and mutual understanding. I believe this dialogue should not be limited to general statements and calls not committing anyone to anything but should become a real contribution to relieving the situation of believers. Religious leaders should oppose intolerance towards the persecution of Christians, Muslims and Jews. No such case should remain unnoticed in the flow of daily news and events. We all in our places are called to do all that depends on us. Only in this case the voice of people of faith will become a convincing and powerful voice of truth', he said.

Metropolitan Hilarion noted that Hungary was one of the countries which had repeatedly drawn the attention of the European community to the act of aggression against the Copts committed on January 1, 2011, in Egypt. 'It was during the chairmanship of Hungary in the European Union that the EU Committee of Ministers instructed the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, Ms Catherine Ashton, to report on the steps taken by the EU for protecting the freedom of faith. It is my conviction that Hungary will continue to initiate and support the adoption of documents for protecting Christians on European and global levels. Among the already adopted documents is the European Parliament's Resolution of January 20, 2011, on the Situation of Christians in the Context of Freedom of Religion and the similar resolution adopted by the Council of Europe Parliamentary Assembly'.

Among the participants in the conference were Cardinal Peter Erde, president of the Conference of European Churches, Metropolitan Emmanuel of France (Patriarchate of Constantinople), Mr. Stein Villumstad, deputy general secretary of the European Council of Religious Leaders, Bishop Laszlo Tokes, vice-president of the European Parliament, Marc Scheuer, director of the secretariat of the UN Alliance of Civilizations, and many other dignitaries.

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Source: <https://mospat.ru/en/news/55545/>