



## **Round Table on Compatriots and Russian Orthodox Church: Experience of Cooperation in Latin America held in Buenos Aires**

A round-table conference on Compatriots and the Russian Orthodox Church: An Experience of Cooperation in Latin America was held on August 22-23, 2010, in Buenos Aires, Argentine. It was organized by the Department for External Church Relations and the Russian Foreign Ministry.

The conference was attended by clergy and laity from Argentina, Brazil, Bolivia, Venezuela, Colombia, Costa Rica, Cuba, Mexico, Panama, Paraguay and Ecuador. Its work was led by Archbishop Mark of Yegoryevsk, head of the Moscow Patriarchate's Administration for Institutions Abroad, Bishop John of Caracas and South America, Hegumen Philip Riabykh, DECR vice-chairman, Hegumen Pavel Khokhlov, secretary of the diocese of South America, Mr. A. Chepurin, director of the Foreign Ministry department for work with compatriots abroad, and Mr. I. Romanchenko, Russian charges-des-affaires in Argentina.

Opening the round table, Archbishop Mark greeted the participants on behalf of His Holiness Patriarch Kirill of Moscow and All Russia. He pointed to the importance of the conference which was to consider ways of preserving the Russian spiritual tradition in Latin America.

Mr. Chepurin brought greetings from the Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov.

Bishop John spoke about a new stage in the life of the Russian emigrants, noting that joint efforts were needed now to support the Russian Church in South America as it was going through a difficult period.

Hegumen Philip read out a message of the head of the Moscow Patriarchate department for external church relations, Metropolitan Hilarion of Volokolamsk. Speaking about his ideas concerning the work of the round table, he said, 'It has already become a good tradition to hold such events. They are really helpful since the clergy and laity who serve in various countries of Latin America can seldom get together because of great distances. In this connection I would like to thank the Russian Foreign Ministry for having organized this event. I would like to inform you that the cooperation between the Russian Church and the Ministry has been put on a solid legal basis as the Russian Federal Assembly has recently adopted a federal law on amendments to the Law on Compatriots. It provides, among other things, for the state support in the implementation of the right to found compatriots' religious organizations abroad and for their socially significant initiatives'.

Participants shared their experience in fulfilling pastoral service in their countries and carrying out educational, social and cultural projects at their parishes. For instance, Mr. Zabolotsky, Brazil, spoke about the celebrations to mark the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Russian emigration in the Brazilian State of Rio Grande do Sul and the book published on the occasion. 'It is the Orthodox church which is the center of our life abroad', he said. He noted with bitterness that there are compatriots in South America who have not yet recognized the church unity. Therefore, he believes, it is necessary to set up a mechanism for bringing Russian believers back from the schism.

Speaking about the mission of Russian emigrant abroad, he said, 'Our primary task is to preserve our children and grandchildren in faithfulness to their historical roots'.

In his remarks, S. Kislyakov, chairman of the Compatriots' Coordinating Committee in Mexico, spoke about the considerable work carried out by the Monastery of the Holy Trinity in Mexico City to support compatriots through charity dinners, legal counselling and visiting compatriots in other parts of the country.

The gathering showed a great interest in the remarks of Archpriest Vyacheslav Bachin, rector of the church of Our Lady of Kazan in Cuba. His parish runs a Russian course, organizes photo exhibitions about church life in Russia and hold talks with Cubans who are interested in the Russian spiritual tradition. His parish also takes pastoral care of Ukrainian children affected by the Chernobyl disaster, who are brought to Cuba for treatment.

Summing up the first day, Hegumen Philip said, 'It is good that our conference is held in a constructive spirit. Everyone can speak and share one's experience of work with compatriots and ways of dealing with particular problems characteristic of a particular diocese of the Russian Church in Latin America'.

In conclusion of the first day, Mr. N. Mikhailov made a presentation of the Russian World foundation as director of its American projects.

Opening the meeting on the second day, Father Philip said that compatriots should not rely on the state's support but join efforts to support their own parish, diocese and native land. 'For instance, it would be important if successful businessmen should develop their business in Russia and other countries under the canonical responsibility of the Moscow Patriarchate'. He also said that in introducing local people to Orthodoxy one should bear witness to the universal nature of Orthodoxy but avoid being accused of proselytism.

Rev. Alexy Aedo Vilugron spoke in Spanish about the life and mission of the Russian Orthodox Church

in Chile. 'At present we have three missions in Santiago, Concepcion and Valdivia. There are many Chilean parishioners among us. Unfortunately, there are also those who have not supported the restoration of canonical unity. So we also have problems like in Argentina and Brazil.'

Archpriest Alexy Karpov, Bolivia, in his remarks about the state of affairs in Russian communities in Bolivia and Ecuador pointed to the great help given by the Russian Embassy and the Russian World foundation.

Among the speakers were also Ms, E. Kharina, Costa Rica, Archpriest Alexander Gorbunov, panama, and Hegumen Pavel Khokhov.

Summing up the work of the round-table conference, Bishop John pointed to the still existing pain of the schism in the South American diocese of the Russian Orthodox Church Outside Russia, which has emerged after the canonical unity of the Local Russian Orthodox Church was restored.

*DECR Communication Service*

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