



THE 5TH CONGRESS OF LEADERS OF WORLD AND TRADITIONAL RELIGIONS

On June 10-11, 2015, Astana hosted the 5th Congress of Leaders of World and Traditional Religions themed "The Dialogue of Religious Leaders and Politicians in the Name of Peace and Development". Participants of the two-day congress discussed the responsibility to humanity of religious and political leaders, the influence of religion on young people, new trends and prospects of interaction between religion and politics, dialogue based on mutual respect and understanding between the leaders and followers of world and traditional religions for the sake of peace, security and harmony and many other issues. In the framework of the interactive platform of the Congress there was a meeting of spiritual and political leaders sharing the same understanding of integrity of the world and a sense of community in the face of the globalization of conflicts.

It should be emphasized that the initial idea of establishing a congress of spiritual hierarchy belongs to the President of Kazakhstan Nursultan Nazarbayev. The initiative of Kazakh Leader to create a unique inter-religious dialogue platform has opened a new path to the world community for struggling against fanaticism, extremism and terrorism.

The 1st Congress of Leaders of World and Traditional Religions was held in Astana on September 24, 2003. From the very beginning, the Congress was recognized by spiritual hierarchs, so the participants from 13 countries in Europe, Asia and Africa could easily start discussion on strengthening the international dialogue among world religions and cultures, deepening and reinforcing the mutual understanding among religious communities, so as developing a culture of tolerance and mutual respect among religions, cultures and civilizations. Established

format of the inter-faith summits have demonstrated its efficiency showing to the world its peacekeeping and humanitarian potential. Therefore, the participants of the 1st Congress came to the conclusion to hold inter-faith summit every 3 year and established the Secretariat of the Congress.

Specially for holding such kind of international forums, Kazakh authorities constructed the Palace of Peace and Reconciliation in Astana, which hosted the 2nd Congress on September 12-13, 2006. For that time, over 43 delegations from more than 20 countries all over the world attended the Congress. As a result of the conducted consultation on the theme "Religion, Society and International Security", the participants signed an important document as "The Principles of Interfaith Dialogue".

The 3rd Congress was held in Astana on July 1-2, 2009 and themed "The Role of Leaders of Religion in Creating a World Based on Tolerance, Mutual Respect and Cooperation". The growing number of participants, namely, 77 delegations from 35 countries over the world, demonstrated the importance of both showing the world community the spiritual and moral foundations of conflict solving and necessity to prevent further politicization of theological disputes and attempts to discredit one religion in the name of another one.

Year after year, the established inter-faith summit worked on widening the geographic coverage of its participation. Therefore, 87 delegations from 40 countries attended the 4th Congress titled "The Peace and Reconciliation - the Choice of Humanity" and held in Astana on May 30-31, 2012. However, the 5th Congress has held the largest number of participants – 112 delegations from 44 countries over the world. Besides that, the last

forum ranked as the first with the number of high-ranking participants such as the President of Finland Sauli Niinisto, the King Abdullah II of Jordan the UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon, the Deputy Secretary-General of the Muslim World League Abdurrahman ben Abdullah al-Zeid, the Secretary-General of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation Iyad Amin Madani and heads other authoritative organizations.

After the 5th Congress of Leaders of World and Traditional Religions, the spiritual hierarchs and politicians adopted the Astana Declaration, which highlighted that the leaders of religion should encourage politicians to take the road of peace and harmony. It was also decided to hold the 6th Congress in Astana in 2018.

There are no doubts that convening an inter-faith summit in Astana could make a significant contribution to the spiritual development of different societies worldwide. At the beginning of 21st century it became more obvious that without the mutual respect among peoples of different cultural and religious identities it would be impossible to promote harmony among the nations. Therefore, the Congress of Leaders of World and Traditional Religions occupies an important place among the other global initiatives such as the Alliance of Civilizations (AOC) launched in 2005 by the Prime Ministers of Turkey and Spain, to be later adopted by the Secretary General of the United Nations.

It is important to notice that both initiatives the Congress and the AOC shape a paradigm of international security based on maintaining efficient dialogue between people and groups belonging to different religious and cultural backgrounds.

Politics, Foreign Affairs and Security

- The Secretary-General of the United Nations (UN) Ban Ki-moon started its Central Asian trip visiting Tajikistan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, and Turkmenistan to support and promote a common response to the many cross-border challenges the region faces, including environmental issues, water and energy, drug trafficking and trans-boundary crime.
- The Deputy Director of ports and special zones of Iran's Ports and Sailing Organization Jalil Eslami announced that the country would host the 7th joint meeting of the port managers of the Caspian Sea littoral countries. The meeting would be held in November in Iranian Amirabad Port and would be attended by all Caspian Sea littoral state officials in ports and maritime affairs. The 6th joint meeting of the five-way port managers of the Caspian countries was held in Russia in September, 2013.
- The Ministry of Defense of Russia stated that Russian Northern Fleet has completed naval exercises in the Barents Sea that included anti-ship, anti-submarine drills with torpedoes and depth charges. During the military exercise, the search and striking groups of navy vessels conducted anti-ship maneuvering.
- The Turkish authorities ordered to open the border near the village of Akchakale for Syrian refugees after the refugees started to cross the border under the control. Turkey was expected about 2,500 refugees.

Economy, Finance and Energy

- The Ministry of Economic Development and Trade of Tajikistan announced that in the next three years, the country would start importing crude oil from Afghanistan. It was planned that Afghan oil would be refined at a new oil refinery to be constructed in the Danghara Free Economic Zone in

Tajikistan by China's Dong Ying Heli Investment and Development Co. Ltd.

- Kazakhstan finalized the negotiations of its World Trade Organization (WTO) accession term at the Working Party meeting. The draft WTO Accession Package would be submitted to its members for official approval on June 22, 2015.
- During the 4th European Union-Tajikistan Cooperation Committee meeting, the European Commission reaffirmed its commitment to provide new development funding of €251 million to Tajikistan for the period 2014-2020. The funds would focus on vital sectors for growth and social stability in Tajikistan, such as rural development, health, and education.
- China launched a cargo train service connecting its far western Xinjiang region with Moscow. The railway authorities in Xinjiang stated that the additional cargo train service would contribute to the economic development of the autonomous region, which was seen as a "core area" of the Silk Road Economic Belt. Since March, 2014, Xinjiang has opened cargo train service to Kazakhstan, Georgia, Iran, Turkey and Chelyabinsk in Russia. The trains would be able to transport \$8.1 billion of cargo a year.
- The HSBC announced its desire to leave the banking market of Turkey due to the plan of the staff reduction, which would cover 50,000 employees of the bank worldwide. The HSBC also announced the intention to sell its loss-making offices in Turkey and Brazil.
- The World Bank raised the outlook for growth in Uzbekistan's GDP in 2015 to 7.6% from 7.4% forecasted in January, 2015. At the same time, the outlook for Uzbekistan's GDP growth in 2016 was decreased to 7.8% from 8.2%.
- The International Monetary Fund stated that the deficit of the state budget of Azerbaijan would

amount to 6% of GDP in 2015. It was also mentioned that sustained decline in GDP could not be ruled out if oil prices would fall further or the post-devaluation would stress the banking system.

- Chief of Staff of the Russian Presidential Executive Office Sergei Ivanov announced that inflation in Russia would be expected to reach 11.8% in 2015. Beside that Russia's GDP would decrease by 2.8-2.9% at the end of the year.

Society and Culture

- The 5th Congress of Leaders of World and Traditional Religions was held in Astana. The main topic of the Congress was "The Dialogue of Religious Leaders and Politicians in the Name of Peace and Development". About 112 delegations from 44 countries took part in this event.
- The international conference "Water for life" was held in Dushanbe. More than 300 high-ranking international delegates took part in this conference and discussed progress and challenges with the UN's International Decade for Action "Water for Life" for the period of 2005-2015.
- Baku hosted the European Games 2015. The program of the Games involved the athletes from 20 countries, including Azerbaijan, Slovakia, Poland, Hungary, Spain, the Czech Republic, Russia, Turkey, and Ukraine.
- A group of Russian military experts has arrived in the far eastern Chukotka Autonomous Area to prepare the Eastern Military District's drones for monitoring missions in the Arctic.
- The Delegation of the European Union to Kazakhstan, the UN's Development Program, UN's Economic Commission for Europe and Water Resources Committee of the Ministry of Agriculture of Kazakhstan has launched the project "Supporting Kazakhstan's transition to Green Economy".