



The sixth meeting of the Commission for Dialogue between the Russian Orthodox Church and the Assyrian Church of the East took place in Iraq



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From September 22 to 27, with the blessing of His Holiness Patriarch Kirill of Moscow and All Rus' and His Holiness Catholicos-Patriarch of the Assyrian Church of the East Mar Awa III, the sixth meeting of the Commission for Dialogue between the Russian Orthodox Church and the Assyrian Church of the East took place in Erbil (Kurdish Autonomous Region of Iraq). This year marks the tenth anniversary of the Commission's work.

The Moscow Patriarchate was represented at the meeting by: Bishop Clement of Krasnoslobodsk and Temnikov – Co-Chairman of the Commission; Hieromonk Stefan (Igumnov) – DECR Secretary for Inter-Christian Relations, Secretary of the Commission; S. G. Alferov, DECR staff member.

From the Assyrian Church of the East: Bishop of Baghdad Mar Elia Isaac – Co-Chairman of the Commission; Chorbishop Samano Odisho – Representative of the Assyrian Church of the East in

Russia, Acting Secretary of the Commission; Chorbishop Nikodim Yukhanaev – Representative of the Assyrian Church of the East in Armenia; Deacon Roland Bidzhamov.

The meeting of the Commission was preceded by an audience with His Holiness Catholicos-Patriarch Mar Awa III, held on September 22 at the Central Residence of the Catholicos-Patriarchs of the Assyrians.

At the conclusion of the Commission's meeting, a joint communiqué was adopted, stating:

“The results of bilateral dialogue over the past ten years have been summarized, especially in the time since the previous meeting of June 17–21, 2024 in Saransk and Krasnoslobodsk (Republic of Mordovia, Russian Federation), and plans for further cooperation were discussed in nine key areas:

1) Contacts at the highest level. Coordination of interaction at inter-Christian and international venues.

The Commission noted the value of the brotherly and trusting relations between the Assyrian Church of the East and the Russian Orthodox Church. In today's difficult global circumstances, these relations have acquired special importance.

The Commission considers historically significant the visits to Russia previously made by His Holiness Catholicos-Patriarch Mar Awa III, including his official visit of May 30 – June 10, 2025, and his meetings with His Holiness Patriarch Kirill of Moscow and All Rus'.

For Iraqi Christians, the visit to Baghdad and Mosul in 2002 by His Holiness Patriarch Kirill of Moscow and All Rus', then Metropolitan of Smolensk and Kaliningrad and Chairman of the Moscow Patriarchate's Department for External Church Relations, remains memorable.

Members of the Commission from the Russian Orthodox Church emphasized the importance of the efforts made by His Holiness Catholicos-Patriarch Mar Awa in its support. This is particularly relevant in view of the ongoing persecution of the canonical Orthodox Church in Ukraine and of His Beatitude Metropolitan Onuphry of Kiev and All Ukraine personally, as well as in light of attempts by the authorities of Estonia to legally prohibit the activity of the Estonian Orthodox Christian Church in the country.

At the same time, the Russian Orthodox Church expresses unwavering fraternal solidarity with the Assyrian Church of the East, one of the most persecuted Christian communities in the world. This is especially worth noting in a year that marks the 110th anniversary of the mass extermination of Christians within the Ottoman Empire.

Of special importance is the forthcoming visit to Iraq of Metropolitan Anthony of Volokolamsk, Chairman of the DECR of the Moscow Patriarchate, and his participation in the international conference dedicated to the 1700th anniversary of the Council of Nicaea, organized by the Assyrian Church of the East.

Regular contacts of representatives of the two Churches at international events and cooperation in the work of inter-Christian platforms are welcomed. In this context, the Commission noted the decision made this year on the admission of the parishes of the Assyrian Church of the East in Russia into the Christian Interconfessional Advisory Committee.

2) Cooperation in the media sphere.

This aspect of cooperation includes coverage in the media, especially on official Church resources, of the most important events in the relations between the Assyrian Church of the East and the Russian Orthodox Church.

The Commission also considers it important to implement projects in Russia devoted to Assyrian Christian heritage. In particular, during the reporting period, with the assistance of the Assyrian Church of the East, a trip to Iraq was organized for representatives of the Russian Orthodox Church's TV channel "Spas." Filming was carried out in places connected with the ministry of the Prophets Jonah and Nahum in ancient Mesopotamia. The footage was used in the creation of the two-part documentary investigation "Babylon. The Tower of Pride." The premiere took place on the "Spas" channel on April 14 and 15, 2025.

3) Student exchange.

This area of cooperation remains important in the relations between our brotherly Churches.

In the past academic year, the rector of the parish of the Assyrian Church of the East in Rostov-on-Don, Priest Ephraim Alkhas, was admitted to study at the Saints Cyril and Methodius Theological Institute of Postgraduate Studies. At the same time, the cleric of the Moscow Assyrian parish of the Holy Virgin Mary, Priest Jacob Avdyshev, was enrolled in postgraduate studies at the Moscow Theological Academy.

The Commission plans to continue cooperation in this area, including petitioning the Church authorities to include in bilateral student exchange programs other theological schools of both the Assyrian Church of the East and the Russian Orthodox Church.

4) Academic cooperation.

In June 2025, the educational and methodological program of the course “Ancient Eastern Churches” – a joint project of the DECR of the Moscow Patriarchate and the Saints Cyril and Methodius Theological Institute of Postgraduate Studies – was approved. Its publication as a textbook is planned.

Representatives of the Assyrian Church of the East are among the permanent experts of the course. During the 2024/2025 academic year, with their assistance, about 30 thematic sessions were conducted. Teachers and students of Moscow State University, MGIMO, Higher School of Economics, Peoples' Friendship University of Russia, and other Russian universities attended as listeners and invited experts.

Other academic initiatives were also implemented:

- With the participation of Deacon Roland Bidzhamov and S. G. Alferov, scholarly editing was carried out for the electronic version of the new article “Assyrian Church of the East,” published on the portal of the Russian Orthodox Church’s Church Research Center “Orthodox Encyclopedia.” A printed version of the article is planned, with subsequent translation into English.
- Priest Ephraim Alkhas took part in an international conference on the theme “On the Anniversary of the First Ecumenical Council,” held at the Theological Institute of Postgraduate Studies.
- At the parish of the Holy Virgin Mary of the Assyrian Church of the East in Moscow, a presentation took place of the book *Selected Epistles of the Holy Apostle Paul. Apostolic Readings on the Feasts of the Lord, Sundays, and Memorial Days of Saints throughout the Liturgical Year of the Assyrian Church of the East*. This was the first publication of this liturgical book in Russian. Scholarly and literary editing was carried out with the participation of the DECR of the Moscow Patriarchate.

At the proposal of Bishop Mar Elia Isaac, the Commission plans to publish thematic materials of theological and church-historical character with an educational purpose.

Work has begun on compiling a catalog of handwritten and printed sources preserved in the archives of the Russian Federation concerning the historical heritage of the Assyrians and the Assyrian Church of the East in Russia, especially during the second half of the 19th – early 20th centuries. At present, it contains about 100 titles, including works by Archbishop of Turkestan Sophronius (Sokolsky), Hieromartyr Archpriest Ioann Vostorgov, Archpriest Viktor Sinadsky, Professor V. V. Bolotov, Hieromartyr Archimandrite Kirill (Smirnov), Hieromartyr Pimen (Belolikov), Bishop of Semirechye and Verny, and other outstanding Russian scholars involved in this subject.

Regarding the previously discussed project of exchanging lecture courses by teachers of church disciplines, it was decided to organize by the end of the 2025/2026 academic year a series of lectures in some educational institutions of the Russian Orthodox Church by Chorbishop Nikodim Yukhanaev on the history of the Assyrian Church of the East and Assyrian church heritage.

5) Youth ministry.

The Commission recognizes the usefulness of the agreement concluded in the 2024/2025 academic year on specialized cooperation between the student community of the Theological Institute of Postgraduate Studies and the youth community at the Assyrian parish of the Holy Virgin Mary, named after His Holiness Catholicos-Patriarch Martyr Mar Benyamin Shimun XXI. Special mention should be made of the participation of representatives of the Assyrian community of Moscow in spiritual-patriotic youth events held in Russia in the spring–summer of 2025, organized as part of the celebration of the 80th anniversary of Victory in the Great Patriotic War. The memory of the Assyrians – soldiers of the Red Army who fought against the Nazi invaders – must not be forgotten.

The practice of mutual participation in youth initiatives organized by both Churches will continue. With the blessing of His Holiness Catholicos-Patriarch Mar Awa III, the Second World Youth Congress of the Assyrian Church of the East will be held in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq on June 19–26, 2026, with representatives of the Moscow Patriarchate invited to participate.

6) Assistance in pastoral care for believers of the Assyrian Church of the East in Russia and of the Russian Orthodox Church in Iraq.

The Commission considers pastoral care for the faithful of the Assyrian Church of the East and the Moscow Patriarchate permanently residing in Russia and Iraq, as well as in other countries, to be an area of activity requiring special attention.

With the coordination of the DECR, such assistance continued to be provided, in particular to the Assyrian church community of Rostov-on-Don by the Don Metropolis of the Russian Orthodox Church.

For its part, the Assyrian side of the Commission expressed readiness to provide similar assistance to Russian Orthodox believers living in Iraq. This may include accommodating clergy of the Russian Orthodox Church arriving for this purpose, and providing premises for worship services and parish meetings.

7) Humanitarian and social projects.

From October 2024 to September 2025, with the participation of the DECR and the Synodal Department for Church Charity and Social Ministry of the Russian Orthodox Church, the Assyrian parish of the Holy Virgin Mary organized the delivery of four consignments of humanitarian aid totaling 2.5 tons for civilians affected in the new and border regions of the Russian Federation.

During the meeting, the Commission also considered other relevant projects in this area. In particular, the Assyrian Church of the East received an invitation to send its representative to the 7th Annual International Interfaith Conference *“The Care of the Church for the Mentally Ill: Concepts of Mental Illness in the Dialogue of Clergy and Psychiatrists”* (November 27–30, 2025, Moscow, DECR).

8) Initiatives in the field of church culture.

Since the beginning of 2025, representatives of the Moscow Assyrian community have been taking part in projects of the Cultural and Educational Center *“Book Chamber in Chernigovsky”* operating at the Theological Institute of Postgraduate Studies.

From May 30 – June 12, 2025, at this Center, the first interactive exhibition in Russia of Assyrian church and secular art *“Journey to Assyria. Heritage of Christian Mesopotamia”* was organized, timed to coincide with the visit to Russia of His Holiness Catholicos-Patriarch Mar Awa III. The presentation of the exhibition took place with the personal participation of the Primate of the Assyrian Church of the East.

In December 2025, the Second Moscow Annual Festival of Sacred Music of the Peoples of the Christian East *“Blessed be the Lord Forever!”* is planned at the Holy Virgin Mary parish, together with round tables dedicated to the anniversaries celebrated this year – the 1700th anniversary of the First Ecumenical Council, the 80th anniversary of the Great Victory, and the 10th anniversary of the return of the Patriarchal See of Seleucia-Ctesiphon to its historical Homeland.

9) Theological consultations.

In fulfillment of an earlier agreement, the Assyrian Church of the East sent documents setting out the key provisions concerning its history and doctrine:

- The Creed (Nicene-Constantinopolitan, in the recension used in the Assyrian Church of the East);
- The Confession of Faith of the Assyrian Church of the East.

At the next meeting, the members of the Commission from the Russian Orthodox Church will present

comments on the theological and doctrinal points set forth in the above two documents.”

The results of the Commission’s work will be submitted for approval to the First Hierarchs and Holy Synods of the Russian Orthodox Church and the Assyrian Church of the East.

The next meeting of the Commission is scheduled for 2027 in Russia.

During their stay in Iraq, the delegation of the Moscow Patriarchate held meetings with the Consul General of the Russian Federation in Erbil, M. O. Rubin, visited the city’s landmarks, as well as pre-Christian monuments in its vicinity, including the ruins of an aqueduct built in the 7th century BC by the Assyrian king Sennacherib near the village of Jerwan. The program also included a visit to the Duhok Diocese of the Assyrian Church of the East, where the Commission members were received by its ruling hierarch, Bishop of Duhok and Nineveh Mar Abris Yuhanna, and a pilgrimage to the holy sites of northern Iraq, among them the tomb of the Prophet Nahum in the town of Alqosh, the Rabban Hormizd Monastery near Alqosh, and the Church of the Great Martyr George the Victorious in the town of Soran.

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