

Interreligious dialogue and mutual understanding of civilizations (experience of Kazakhstan)

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Dialogue between different religious traditions has become one of the latest trends of our time. The need for such dialogue is particularly acute now in a multiethnic and multi-confessional environment, first of all in Eurasia. Contacts of different religious communities require the development on the interstate, regional and global scales, because higher levels of understanding and respect can create a favorable environment for the resolution of number of regional conflicts, such as one at the Middle East. Such dialogue can also contribute to solving many global problems the mankind face today, including those generated by the so-called «clash of civilizations».

Republic of Kazakhstan is the best example of a peaceful and mutually beneficial cooperation of the world religions, where the various spiritual traditions coexisted for centuries. By no accident our country is called «the crossroads of civilizations». Kazakhstan is the meeting point of the world's major religions - Islam, Christianity and Buddhism. For centuries in our country live and work together representatives of different ethnic groups. Land of Kazakhstan has become home to representatives of over 120 nationalities and 40 different denominations. Every religion in its own language brings people basic human values, establishes standards of conduct in society, acting as a custodian of moral values. Dialogue between different spiritual traditions for us is not just a good idea, but the centuries-old practice of productive interaction.

After gaining independence Kazakhstan faced the task of building democratic institutions, civil society, ensuring interethnic and interreligious harmony. Spiritual peace and harmony are the factors of consolidation of the people of the republic into a single civic community.

With the global crisis affecting the financial and economic system of the planet, before Kazakhstan is to improve the welfare of all sectors of society, to ensure political stability and security of citizens. President NA Nazarbayev, addressing a message to the people of Kazakhstan on Mar. 6, 2009, called on all political and social forces to unite together to overcome the severest crisis in the history of the planet. As for the head of state, « it is important task to preserve peace and harmony in the country».

Kazakhstan continues to work on improving its own model of political and state structure, combining the generally accepted standards of democratic development and traditions of our society. State policy in the Republic of Kazakhstan in the sphere of religious relations based on the following basic principles:

- Legislative and institutional support for freedom of conscience and religion;
- Creation of equal and favorable conditions for realization of faiths of its functions;
- Promotion the idea of an interfaith dialogue in the country.

The willingness of the President of our country to support the achievement of the harmonious development of human society, the rapprochement between cultures and civilizations, was again announced at the 62nd session of UN General Assembly in 2007, where on his initiative, a resolution was adopted declaring the year of 2010 an «International Year of Rapprochement of Cultures». As a consequence and proof of a peaceful and tolerant policy in the country was the adoption of Kazakhstan's OSCE chairmanship in 2010, and the decision to hold an ordinary meeting of foreign ministers of the Organization of Islamic Conference in 2011 in Kazakhstan.

In Kazakhstan, the largest religions are Islam and Orthodox Christianity. Islam becomes an important factor of spiritual enlightenment and education. According to senses dated January 1st 2009, the country has had 2,488 Muslim religious communities, most of them are included in the structure of the Spiritual Administration of Muslims of Kazakhstan (SAMK), which gradually turns into one of the main mechanisms for the implementation of Islamic revival in Kazakhstan. It may be noted that there was the active participation of the leadership of SAMK in organizing and conducting the congresses of world and traditional religions. Muftiate organized several scientific conferences and seminars on the issue of interreligious dialogue.

Orthodoxy is the second largest religious believers direction. On January 1, 2009 Russian Orthodox Church had 281 religious association on the territory of the republic. Since 2003, the Orthodox community in Kazakhstan, united in the Holy Synod of the ROC established the Metropolitan District.

Islam and Orthodox Christianity are among the major components in the culture-life of the Kazakh and Russian peoples, and not by chance that the State has recognized as official holidays, such holidays as Eid al-Adha and Christmas.

However, along with Islam and Orthodoxy in Kazakhstan fully functioning other religions too, whose representatives are free to exercise their spiritual needs. Officially registered about two thousand religious associations representing Catholicism, Protestantism, Judaism, Buddhism and other religions.

Ensuring freedom of religion and harmonious interfaith relations is one of the main priorities in government policy. Our country is committed to the obligations guaranteed by the Constitution, national legislation and international legal acts. In legal practice, we rely on these international instruments on human rights and freedom of conscience, such as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, the Declaration on the Elimination of All Forms of Intolerance and of Discrimination Based on Religion or Belief, the European Convention on Human Rights and fundamental freedoms, Final Document of the Vienna Meeting 1989 of representatives of the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe.

At the II Congress of Leaders of World and Traditional Religions Head of State decided to establish an International Center of cultures and religions. The main purpose of the Center is to promote the unique experience of Kazakhstan to strengthen inter-faith harmony and unity of the people of Kazakhstan at the international level. One of the primary purpose of our center also includes the development of international relations with countries near and far abroad, as well as studying and learning from other countries, the experience of promoting cultural and spiritual level of the population.

Activity of the International Center of cultures and religions is with the following directions:

- development of conceptual frameworks to create a culture of peace, inter-civilizational, inter-ethnic and interfaith dialogue,
 - increase the level of spirituality, enlightenment in the sphere of religion and culture,
- development of international cooperation in preventing the threats of religious extremism and terrorism,
- opposition to intolerance, xenophobia, persecution of religious beliefs,
- international spread of the experience of peaceful coexistence and mutual enrichment of cultures of peoples living on the territory of Kazakhstan.

In connection with the announcement of the year of 2010 the year of «International Year for the Rapprochement of Cultures» our Center has made a number of proposals for joint projects with UNESCO in the field of inter-civilizational and interfaith dialogue. It is proposed to hold international scientific conferences, to prepare exhibitions, videos and TV shows cycles, to produce a book, to organize the Summer School.

According to sociological studies conducted by the International Center of cultures and religions, the index of «level of tolerance» shows the stability and the value of resources in a society for tolerant relations between people of different faiths. Nevertheless, the need to educate people about interfaith relations relevant today as ever. At a time when religious slogans sometimes justified by appeals to violence, they sound far-fetched accusations and insults at the individual denominations, significantly increasing the role of knowledge in this field.

President of Kazakhstan Nursultan Nazarbayev said at the Congress about the need to bring a spiritual call to the masses. He made several important initiatives, including a proposal to introduce in 2007, one of the leading national TV channels «religious hour», which will allow the most authoritative clergy directly address the millions of people to preach kindness and tolerance. The President invited the leaders of world and traditional religions to speak with an honorary lecture at the walls of the Palace of Peace and Harmony. As the President said, «If the world leaders of Islam, Christianity, Buddhism, Hinduism, Taoism, Judaism, Confucianism and Shintoism annually will be bringing words of peace and harmony to my compatriots, it would be one of the brightest spiritual phenomena in Eurasia».

The growth of interfaith and intercultural interaction - a significant pattern of modern society, which determines the relevance of a culture of peace and interfaith cooperation. A significant element of such axiological culture based on human values is tolerance.

Tolerance is seen by us as a respect and recognition of equality, multidimensionality and diversity of human culture, norms, beliefs and rejection of domination and violence. Tolerance implies willingness to accept others as they are, and interact with them on the basis of consent.

Modern notions of tolerance were largely prepared by the activities of the philosophers of the Enlightenment Era, and by the adoption in 1789 by the Constituent Assembly of France the Declaration of Human and Citizen Rights, which proclaimed freedom of thought and speech. It was possible to recognize the universal value of tolerance and the fundamental component of peace and harmony between religions, peoples and different social groups. In 1995, UNESCO adopted the Declaration of Principles on Tolerance - respect and appreciation of cultural diversity in the world, forms of expression and ways of being human.

Short Encyclopedia of Philosophy gives this definition: «Tolerance is being tolerant to other kinds of views, customs, habits. Tolerance is needed in relations of the peculiarities of

different peoples, nations and religions. It is a sign of confidence and the sense of the reliability of their own position, a sign of an inclusive ideological trend, which is not afraid of comparisons with other points of view and does not avoid the spiritual competition ».

In essence, the concepts of «tolerance» and «being tolerant» (game of words) are synonymous. However, the particular value content of the concept of being tolerant rather narrow and pointed to some limitations in the manifestation: it is assumed that people were forced to endure what can not stand. The term «tolerance» has a broader axiological value, absorbing in its value basics concepts of self-restraint, self-monitoring and self-criticism, respect and tact, ability to understand and forgive.

Problems of religious tolerance as a factor in the integration of modern society are key to our time. In this regard, it is symbolic that the Congress of Leaders of World and Traditional Religions is traditionally held on Kazakh soil. The I Congress was attended by 17 religious delegations, participants of the II Congress were 29 foreign delegations, and at the III Congress arrived 77 delegations from around the world. II and III Congresses were held under the arches of the Palace of Peace and Accord in Astana, which was built as a pyramid, which embodies the aspirations of our country to tolerance, peace and unity with the world community.

To further strengthen tolerance and religious harmony it is necessary to work in the following areas:

1. further development of interreligious dialogue, involving not only religious leaders but also leaders of influential international organizations, heads of state;
2. strengthening of legal mechanisms to protect religious freedom, in search of mutually acceptable standards in the implementation of religious rights and freedoms;
3. protection of traditional moral and spiritual values, the principles of tolerance;
4. education on the spiritual life, including activities designed to promote the values of family and society, the implementation of IT projects on the promotion of world and traditional religions, cultures of various ethnic groups;
5. interaction with civil society, media, educational institutions in the promotion of interfaith harmony;
6. international cooperation, exchange experience with foreign research centers.

Kazakhstan is the unique secular state where there is a rich experience of peaceful coexistence of different cultures and civilizations, which promotes the formation of similar value orientations in the majority of the population, creating a tolerant atmosphere of interethnic and interreligious harmony and mutual respect. The consistent policy aimed at ensuring peace, stability, interethnic and interreligious harmony, is widely supported and welcomed by the world community