

**Inter-ethnic dialogue:
The Kazakhstan model of peaceful coexistence
and preservation of inter-ethnic stability
(brochure)**

*“Every human has the right of conscience, religion and thought liberty” (Article 18)
“liberty of convictions and free expression of them” (Article 19)
“the education must promote understanding, tolerance and friendship between all nations, racial
and religion groups” (Article 26)*
**Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Adopted and proclaimed by General Assembly
resolution 217 A (III) of 10 December 1948**

*“Persons belonging to national minorities have the right to
exercise fully and effectively their human rights and fundamental freedoms
without any discrimination and in full equality before the law.
The participating States will adopt, where necessary, special
measures for the purpose of ensuring to persons belonging to national
minorities full equality with the other citizens in the exercise and enjoyment of
human rights and fundamental freedoms”*
**(31) Document of the Copenhagen Meeting of the Conference
on the Human Dimension of the CSCE**

*“The States Parties to the present Convention, taking due account of the importance of
the traditions and cultural values of each people for the protection and harmonious
development of the child” (Preamble)*
*“States Parties shall respect and ensure the rights set forth in the present Convention to
each child within their jurisdiction without discrimination of any kind, irrespective of the
child's national, ethnic or social origin...” (Article 2)*
**Convention on the Rights of the Child,
November 20, 1989**

*“Each State Party to the present Covenant undertakes to respect and to ensure to all
individuals within its territory and subject to its jurisdiction the rights recognized in the
present Covenant, without distinction of any kind, such as race, colour, sex, language,
religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth or other status”*
(Article 2)
**United Nations
International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights
December 16, 1966**

*“The States Parties to the present Covenant undertake to guarantee that the rights enunciated in
the present Covenant will be exercised without discrimination of any kind as to race, colour, sex,
language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth or other
status” (Preamble, Article 2)*
**International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights
December 16, 1966**

“States Parties condemn racial discrimination and undertake to pursue by all appropriate means and without delay a policy of eliminating racial discrimination in all its forms and promoting understanding among all races, and, to this end: (a) Each State Party undertakes to engage in no act or practice of racial discrimination against persons, groups of persons or institutions and to ensure that all public authorities and public institutions, national and local, shall act in conformity with this obligation” (Article 2)

In compliance with the fundamental obligations laid down in article 2 of this Convention, States Parties undertake to prohibit and to eliminate racial discrimination in all its forms and to guarantee the right of everyone, without distinction as to race, colour, or national or ethnic origin, to equality before the law, notably in the enjoyment of the following rights (Article 5)

***International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination
December 21, 1965***

Multi-ethnic and multicultural community in Kazakhstan

*UN General Secretary, Kofi Annan,
“Kazakhstan may serve as example of a peaceful multiethnic country
where ethnic diversity is a blessing, but not the curses”¹*



Historically Kazakhstan has always been a crossroads of various religions, such as Christianity, Islam, Buddhism and Zoroastrianism, all of which have greatly influenced the development of the human race. The territory of Kazakhstan was one of the most important sections of the Great Silk Road, connecting countries through trade and cultural exchange and playing the role of a bridge between East and West.

Over several years the dynamics of demographic processes and migration have made Kazakhstan into one of the most multinational, multiconfessional, multiethnic countries in the world.



There are approximately 130 ethnic groups living in Kazakhstan. In July 2006, the population included the following main ethnic groups: Kazakh (58.9%), Russian (25.9%), Ukrainian (2.9%), Uzbek (2.8%), Uighur, Tatar, and German (1.5% each), and other groups (4%).

For 16 years Kazakhstan has implemented a considerable state policy of multi-ethnic society revival, self-preservation and unity, and multicultural development promoting . Kazakhstan national policy is based on transparent and clear postulation principles such as inter-ethnic cooperation, social stability as a foundation for the fair ethnic issues solution , rule of law, state independence strengthening , and an active policy of integration.



Those principles are aligned with the international law and the Constitution of the Republic of Kazakhstan.

According to information from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Kazakhstan had on 1th February 2007 become a signatory of 160 international agreements including the UN International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Human Rights, the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination, and the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

International law and the Constitution of Kazakhstan state that everyone has rights and freedoms regardless of race, colour, and ethnic or social origin. These principles are enshrined in Article 2 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, in Article 2 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, and in Article 5 of the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination.

¹ From the speech at the meeting with Board members of the Assembly of People of Kazakhstan, October 18, 2002.

The Constitution of Kazakhstan also states that everyone is equal before the law (Article 14). No one shall be subject to any discrimination for reasons of origin, social or property status, occupation, sex, race, nationality, language, religion, convictions, place of residence or any other factors (Article 14, item 2). Violation of the right to equality (in particular in connection with such factors as race, nationality or religion) is punishable by the Criminal Code of Kazakhstan.

The United Nations has praised Kazakhstan's implementation of international conventions. In the Report on Human Rights in Kazakhstan of 2007, the UN experts of the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination stated that all necessary conditions for the peaceful coexistence of different ethnic groups and confessions had been created. The recommendations elaborated by the Committee after considering Kazakhstan's report are now being implemented in steps by the Government of Kazakhstan.

Provision of equal rights regardless of nationality is a sign of respect to every ethnic group and promotes the elimination of ethnic prejudices.

The right to speak one's native language is closely connected with the right to choose one's nationality and language of communication. The right to learn native languages and the way in which this right is guaranteed in Kazakhstan are reflected in the Constitution of Kazakhstan (Article 7, item 3 and Article 19, item 2). Article 6 of Kazakhstan's law On Languages lays down the following rights: "to choose any language of communication, upbringing, education and creative work. The Government creates conditions for the learning and development of all nations' languages in Kazakhstan."

Language policy in educational institutions is implemented in accordance with the Constitution and legislation of Kazakhstan. All educational institutions regardless of property and form of education provide teaching in and develop Kazakh as their official language, and provide for the learning of Russian in accordance with official compulsory standards for each level.

Newspapers and magazines are published not only in Kazakh and Russian but also in eleven other languages including Ukrainian, Polish, English, German, Korean, Uigur, Turkish, and Dungan.

Among them there are national editions - the Korean  "Kore ilbo", the Ukrainian "Ukrainski novini", the German "Deutsche allgemeine Zeitung" and the Uighur "Uighur avazi", all of which are state publications and are funded from the state budget.

Polish TV "Polonia" is broadcasted in the northern region, and Uzbek TV is broadcasted in the southern region. The National TV company "Kazakhstan" and "Kazakh Radio" broadcast programmes in Korean, Uighur and German.

In addition to these, the mass media of all ethnic groups in Kazakhstan receive financial support from the Government, which is not the case in many other countries.

in the 2007 Report on Human Rights in Kazakhstan noted, "Kazakhstan wishes every nationality to live a full life, to revive its own language, traditions, culture, to have equal rights and opportunities regardless of nationality, language,

religion, to feel themselves as the citizens of sovereign Kazakhstan and to be proud of this fact.”

The bright example of the securing of national identity is provided by the Dungan ethnic group, which has preserved its written language and culture with outstanding success.

The inter-ethnic concord is being promoted vigorously in Kazakhstan. That can be approved by a wide range of institutions and activities: schools teaching native languages, Sunday schools run by the so-called “ethnic cultural centres” devoted to the study of native languages and traditions, theatres, events put on by ethnic groups, and the publication and broadcasting of mass media in a wide variety of languages, reflecting the presence of the ethnic groups in any given area. For instance, **16 native languages** (including German, Polish, Ukrainian, Korean, Tatar, Turkish, Chechen, Azerbaijani, Kurdish, and Uighur) are taught in educational institutions.

In accordance with the National Programme on Functioning and Development of Languages in 2001–2010, educational institutions guarantee the right of ethnic groups to study their native languages.

In 2003–2004, of 3 million pupils at school in Kazakhstan, 20,000 (0.7%) were studying in the Uighur language, 90,000 (2.9%) in Uzbek, 3,000 (0.09%) in Tajik, and 165 in Ukrainian.

In 2005–2006, of 3 million pupils at school in Kazakhstan, 1.5 million (57.4%) were studying in the Kazakh language, 1 million (38.8%) in Russian, 17,000 (0.6%) in Uighur, 83,000 (3%) in Uzbek, 3,000 (0.1%) in Tajik, 178 in Ukrainian, and 485 in German.

More than 3,500 children are now learning their native languages in 79 Sunday schools, while in 2005 there were 76 Sunday-schools with a total of 3,000 pupils.

In accordance with Articles 4 and 36 of the law On Education, the Government guarantees free secondary education, based on national official standards, for every citizen of Kazakhstan including those from the ethnic minorities. Children of foreign citizens, “oralmans” (Kazakh repatriates), expatriates and refugees permanently living in Kazakhstan receive free secondary education in national educational institutions.

Thus, Kazakhstan has all conditions for satisfying the needs of ethnic groups and for promoting harmonious inter-ethnic relations. Government measures undertaken to protect the civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights of ethnic groups meet the standards of the Declaration on the Rights of Persons

Belonging to National or Ethnic, Religious and Linguistic Minorities.



Assembly of People of Kazakhstan

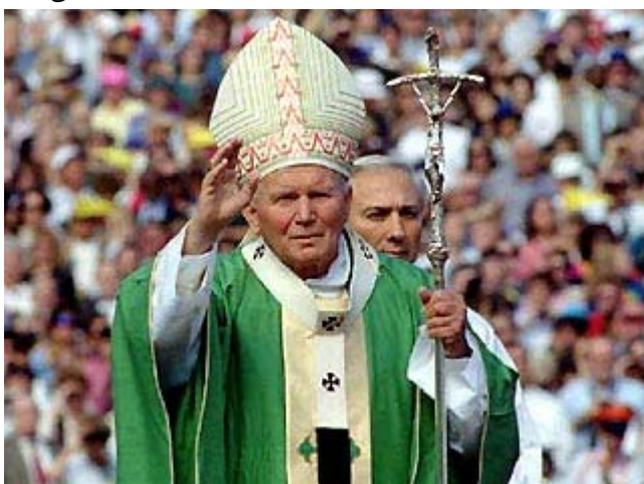
During the first stages of independence, Kazakhstan had to cope with the complications

of increasing globalization, cultural interconnection and migration flows. There was a need for a new generation in Kazakhstan who understands value of mutual respect, openness, and trust, regardless of origin and nationality.

There was also a clear need to create a new social institution capable of carrying out important tasks related to the stability reinforcement in the multi-ethnic Kazakh land. In 1995 presidential decree brought into being a new and innovative consultative and advisory body under the President - the Assembly of People of Kazakhstan (APK).

The main goal of the Assembly is to strengthen social stability and thereby to provide a basis for the fair solution of ethnic issues.

The Chairman of the Assembly chooses the APK's members from the representatives of state authorities, national and cultural unions and social organizations, and from the ranks of those active in social politics.



The Assembly is fifteen years old now and the world community has shown great interest in Kazakhstan's experience, which is also highly valued by international experts.

UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan, Pope John Paul II, and Max van der Stoep, High Commissioner for National Minorities of the OSCE applauded for the Assembly foundation and work. They believe Kazakhstan can be taken by other countries as an

example for the peaceful coexistence of different confessions and ethnic groups.²

The following ethnic groups are represented in the Assembly: German (49 members), Kazakh (40), Korean (36), Tatar (29), Slav (27), Chechen and Ingush (26), Azerbaijani (23), Uighur (21), Russian (20), Ukrainian (19), Jewish (18), Polish (16), Turkish (14), Greek (12), Armenian (11), Byelorussian (10), Dungan (10), Kurd (8), Uzbek (8), Cossack (6), with the Turkmen, Bulgarians and Dagestanian having four members each, the Kyrgyz and Tajik three members each, the Karachay, Balkarian, Chinese, Chuvash and Karakalpak two members each, and the Assyrian, Czech, Baltic nations, Georgian, Osetin, Lezgin, Iranian, Buryat, Hungarian and Romanian one member each.

The number of ethnic cultural centres was tripled during the years of reforms. The Small Regional Assembly of Kazakhstan People in Almaty was established in 1995. Including more than 30 ethnic cultural centres, the Small Regional Assembly in Almaty became a very important centre of public diplomacy, with its constant connection to ethnic groups and their historical motherlands. Civil peace and domestic stability play a crucial role in it. Such

² The official site of the Government of the Republic of Kazakhstan (RK), 23/09/03. Interview of I. Tasmagambetov, Kazakhstan General Secretary to Kazakhstan information agency.

festivals as “Atameken”, “Menin Otanym”, and “We are – people of Kazakhstan” became very popular in Kazakhstan.

The Assembly’s activities maintain the growth of Kazakhstan’s international authority as a country with a notable capacity for solving problems in the field of inter-ethnic relations. The Assembly’s contribution is highly appreciated by foreign leaders. Kofi Annan, the UN Secretary-General, visiting our country, called it “*an example of international consent and stable development for other countries.*” The same sentiments have been expressed by President Jacques Chirac, King Fahd Ben Abdel Aziz Al Saud of Saudi Arabia, and John Paul II.

Margaret Thatcher, the ex-Prime Minister of Great Britain, had the following to say about the said the processes that had been set in motion: “The pessimists might have thought that ethnic and religious diversity would weaken your country, but the reverse is true. Your country is an example for others.”³

The Assembly and the Parliament

It is well known that the legislation of Kazakhstan forbids the establishment of political parties on an ethnic or confessional basis.⁴ At the same time, the existence of a variety of ethnic and social unions demonstrates the necessity of enhancing policy on inter-ethnic issues in Kazakhstan.

This is why new initiatives were undertaken in 2007 for the strengthening of inter-ethnic harmony. The law “On changes and additions to the Constitution of Kazakhstan” was enacted in May 2007, introducing, among other things, proportional representation and member quotas in the Assembly.

These corrections allowed the Assembly to acquire the new status it now enjoys: having been a consultative and advisory institution, it now became a constitutional organ providing different ethnic groups with a means of representation in Kazakhstan’s political and social life.

The system of proportional representation ensures fairer results at elections, with the result that tensions between the different ethnic groups are being reduced.

Providing the Assembly with quotas in Parliament is equally important for inter-ethnic harmony, as it reflects ethnic diversity in the legislative body.

Systems of this kind are in operation all over the world. Quotas for ethnic minorities are established in the supreme legislative structures of Belgium, Spain, Finland, India, Hungary, Poland, Slovenia, Croatia and many other countries.⁵ All of these states are multi-ethnic. The quota system is applied to guarantee ethnic groups the opportunity to express their points of view and pursue their interests on the national level. All this makes it easier to foresee inter-ethnic conflicts in society before they reach a critical stage.

At the same time, all developed democracies follow certain basic procedures to protect individual rights. All members of multi-ethnic society have equal rights

³ The Assembly of People of Kazakhstan, information site (www.assembly.kz).

⁴ Constitution of RK, Article 5, item 3, 30/08/1995; The law of RK “On political parties”, Article 5, item 7, 15/07/2002

⁵ The official site of the President of RK.

and duties, regardless of whether they belong to an ethnic minority or to the ethnic majority.

The Assembly's right to participate in the work of Parliament not only enhances its status and authority but also gives it greater responsibility. From now on, all legislative acts accepted by Parliament have to be subjected to additional examination for compliance with criteria of international harmony, tolerance and equal rights. The Assembly members will directly participate in legislative activity and enact laws for society.

On August 20, 2007, the Assembly successfully put the new norm of the Constitution into practice. For the first time, that unique civil society institution elected members of parliament, with 337 individuals voting, all of them being members of the Assembly. The list of candidates was composed of nine particularly well-known and active members, all of whom had to be supported by the majority of regional electorate. The election results were announced after the secret ballot had finished and the votes had been counted.

The following were amongst the members from the Assembly elected to join Mazhilis of the Parliament: Murat Ahmadiev, Valerii Bishnichenko, Leonid Pitalenko, Raisa Polishuk, Kairat Sadvakasov, Ruzakul Almuradov, Lyudmola Hachieva, and Viktor Tcoi.

The fact that the Assembly of People of Kazakhstan is represented in parliament ensures that the different ethnic groups have a say in the country's supreme legislative institution.

The Assembly of People of Kazakhstan and European Union ethnic groups

The Assembly includes four associations and two ethnic cultural centres representing European Union nationalities: "Renascence", the association of German social communities; the Union of Kazakhstan Polish Communities; the Association of Kazakhstan Greek Communities "Filiya"; the Association of Kazakhstan Romanian-Moldavians; the Bulgarian Cultural Centre of Kazakhstan; and the Hungarian Cultural Centre.

Statistical data from 2006 indicated that there were 293,681 ethnic Europeans living in Kazakhstan.⁶ The Germans formed the majority with 220,000. As has been pointed out by Evgenii Primakov, the Chairman of the Chamber for Trade and Industry of the Russian Federation: "President N. Nazarbayev is firmly fulfilling his idea of allowing the Eurasian roots of Kazakhstan society to create a unique variant of multicultural development."⁷

The association of German social communities in Kazakhstan "Renascence" was one of the first organizations registered by the Ministry of Justice in 1996.

Associations and cultural centres of EU nationalities actively cultivate relations with their motherland. For instance, the Association of Kazakhstan

⁶ Population census in Kazakhstan in 2006.

⁷ *The Economist*, 11/2003.

Greeks Communities “Filiya” has held courses for Greek language teachers and organized visit of the presidents of Kazakhstan’s universities to Greece to introduce them to Greek universities and to promote co-operation.

Public service on the rights of ethnic minorities

In accordance with the Constitution and the law “On public service”, all citizens of Kazakhstan, including representatives of ethnic minorities, have the right to be accepted to work in public service. The requirements for the candidates are determined by the character of job, its functions, and the relevant legislation.

A fair selection process is ensured by means of a competitive examination in several stages, testing the candidates on their knowledge of the use of the Kazakh and Russian languages in the mass media and on their knowledge of legislation, after which the candidates also have to attend an interview.

It should furthermore be noted that Kazakhstan legislation on public service stipulates that it is not necessary to know the State language to work as a public servant.

Article 12 prohibits any kind of discrimination or limitation of rights on grounds of sex, race, nationality, language, social origin, beliefs, place of residence, religion, affiliation with any social communities, or any other circumstances.

The main condition for entrance into public service for RK citizens is compliance with the requirements of the duties involved, as approved by order of the Chairman of the Public Service Agency.

The programme of support for ethnic Kazakhs living abroad

Multilateral connections are cultivated with Kazakhs living abroad in order to support them in the fields of education, culture, and migration, with the general aim of helping them to return to Kazakhstan.

The most important features of this established system are: maintenance in the educational and cultural spheres, and the return of compatriots to their motherland.

There are now 4.5 million Kazakhs living outside Kazakhstan, spread over more than 40 countries all over the world. This number represents one third of the whole population of Kazakhs.

The majority of these expatriates live in Kazakhstan’s neighbour countries. According to the statistical data, 1.5 million Kazakhs live in Uzbekistan, 1.3 million in China, 900,000 in the Russian Federation, 100,000 in Turkmenistan, 80,000 in Mongolia, and 45,000 in Kyrgyzstan. Many Kazakhs live in Turkey, Iran and Afghanistan. There are also Kazakh diasporas in several countries of western Europe.

Today there are Kazakh national and cultural centres operating in eleven countries, amongst them Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, and Mongolia.

The World Kazakh Association has had a positive experience of co-operating with ethnic Kazakhs abroad. The association has realized many measures designed to strengthen connections with Kazakhs in all spheres of social activity. It now works directly with foreign governments and social communities.

Comments



Jacques Chirac, formerly President of France, said about Kazakhstan: *“This country began to build a sovereign nation in complicated conditions. With its great devotion to its national values, it pursues democracy and follows the maxims of the constitutional state, which are valid for all people all over the world.”*⁸



President of the Swiss Confederation Pascal Kushpen made the following statement at a press conference held in Bern on 20 January 2003 after summit talks with N. Nazarbayev: *“Kazakhstan is an island of stability in Central Asia, where due respect is paid to the most important human rights such as the right to live in peace and the rights of national minorities.”*

The official statement of OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities Mr. Van der Stool ran as follows: *“The Government of Kazakhstan implements a logical policy to create the conditions necessary for the realization of the interests of all ethnic groups living in Kazakhstan and for the further co-ordination of inter-ethnic relations. Adherence to this policy by the majority of civil institutions and citizens, including the OSCE, provides a solid basis for the further stabilization of inter-ethnic relations in the country.”*



⁸ From letter to Nazarbaev, March, 2005 (www.assembly.kz).

Did you know . . . ?



. . . that Kazakhstan is meeting place for world civilizations and religions? The famous Islamic philosopher Hodga Ahmet Yassau, highly respected by the Turkish people, spent his last years in Southern Kazakhstan, where one can still admire his beautiful mausoleum. The Russian Orthodox saint Sebastian Karagandinskii is likewise buried in Kazakhstan.

Kazakhstan also has a Jewish holy place: the grave of Lyubavichskii Rebe in Almaty.



. . . that manuscripts of ancient Hinduism refer to Kazakhstan as “the north land – grand motherland”? You can find the ruins of Buddhist monasteries along Sary-Arka and Priirtyshye. There is a legend that Zaratustra began his life in Kazakh Altay.

Kazakhstan? In other countries this day is celebrated as Labour Day or as a day of solidarity with the people.

. . . 1 May is Unity Day for the nations



of



. . . 22 September is the Day of People’s Languages?

. . . all mass media institutions and theatres of ethnic groups receive financial support from the Government?

. . . the Republican German Drama Theatre DTA was founded in 1989. In addition to their own theatre, Germans in Kazakhstan have their own radio and TV channel “Wir Deutschen”.





... the oldest of all the ethnic group theatres is the Republican Korean theatre of musical comedy?. This year this theatre group celebrates its 75th anniversary. Kazakhstan's Koreans are committed to preserving their traditions and live in peace with all nationalities of Kazakhstan.

... the Uigur music and drama theatre named after Kujamyarov is 72 years old?



... there are only 800 ethnic Assyrians living in Kazakhstan? They have a Sunday school for youth (just one in all Central Asia) and their own folklore choir.



...that there are many associations, unions, communities of European ethnic groups in Kazakhstan, such as communities of Poles, Romanians, Hungarians, Association of Greek communities and other organizations.



Inter-religious dialogue: Kazakhstan's experience is relevant to the contemporary world

"Everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion" (Article 18)

"Everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression" (Article 19)

"Education shall be directed to the strengthening of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms. It shall promote understanding, tolerance and friendship among all nations, racial or religious groups" (Article 26)

Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Adopted and proclaimed by General Assembly resolution 217 A (III) of 10 December 1948

“Tolerance. Human beings must respect one other, in all their diversity of belief, culture and language. Differences within and between societies should be neither feared nor repressed, but cherished as a precious asset of humanity. A culture of peace and dialogue among all civilizations should be actively promoted”.

United Nations Millennium Declaration

General Assembly resolution 55/2 of 8 September 2000

“Everyone will have the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion. This right includes freedom to change one’s religion or belief and freedom to manifest one’s religion or belief, either alone or in community with others, in public or in private, through worship, teaching, practice and observance. The exercise of these rights may be subject only to such restrictions as are prescribed by law and are consistent with international standards”.

(9.4) Document of the Copenhagen Meeting of the Conference on the Human Dimension of the CSCE

A centuries-long tradition of tolerance

Over the centuries, a wide variety of confessions have coexisted on the territory of modern Kazakhstan. Manichaeism, Zoroastrianism, Christianity, Shamanism, Buddhism, Islam and other religions have interacted and influenced each other, producing a unique alloy of approaches to spirituality.

Kazakh society has a long tradition of nurturing tolerance and mutual respect. This tradition has been a decisive factor in ensuring peace, stability and economic progress in Kazakhstan and continues to impress the world generally. For Kazakhstan, tolerance is not only a standard of political culture but also a national principle.

While visiting Kazakhstan in September 2001 the late Pope John Paul II stated: *“Peace and consent in the Great Steppe are impressive, confirming that peace is possible in a multinational state.”*

As the 2007 International Religious Freedom Report of the US State Department pointed out, *“The population has maintained its long tradition of secularism and tolerance.”*⁹

The Republic of Kazakhstan respects freedom of belief as a basic human right. It guarantees its citizens equality of rights regardless of their attitude towards religion or their religious beliefs. It likewise acknowledges the cultural and historical value of religions and the importance of inter-faith consent, religious tolerance and respect for religious beliefs.

Today more than 40 religious confessions have a presence in Kazakhstan.

The predominant religion in Kazakhstan is Sunni Islam, with 1,648 Islamic Religious Associations and 1,534 mosques operating in the country today. According to the Spiritual Directorate of Muslims there are nine million Muslims in Kazakhstan today, from 24 different ethnic groups.

The Russian Orthodox Church is the second largest religious group in Kazakhstan. 30 per cent of the population are Orthodox, and there are 230 Orthodox associations and 220 parishes or congregations in the country.

There are over 300,000 Catholics living in Kazakhstan, belonging to a total of 250 parishes or congregations, 90 religious communities, and 160 visiting groups. There are about 40 Catholic churches, and 200 chapels and houses of prayer.

Numerous other confessions and religions are represented in Kazakhstan, including Lutheranism and other Protestant churches and groups, Judaism, and Buddhism.

Since Kazakhstan became independent, its population of around 15.5 million people has seen the opening of more than 1,500 new mosques, of over 170 Orthodox congregations, of more than thirty Catholic churches, and of over 1,000 houses of prayer and Protestant missions. For the first time for many centuries. a Buddhist temple was built. While fifteen years ago there was only one Jewish synagogue, there are now around twenty Jewish communities of various kinds in operation.

⁹ International Religious Freedom Report 2007. Released by the Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor

According to experts' estimates, the number of believers in Kazakhstan has increased from 20-25 per cent by 40 per cent as compared with the mid-1980s.

As Kazakhstan is a secular state, religious education does not form part of the general school curriculum. However, in recent years all the necessary conditions have been established both for religious education and training and also for general freedom of conscience and religion. New initiatives have included the foundation of the Islamic University, of regular courses held by mosques to give primary spiritual instruction, and of Sunday schools by various different confessions. 1998 saw the foundation of the country's first Catholic Higher Seminary "Mary Mother of the Church".

In 2005, the Committee on Religious Issues was created in order to guarantee religious freedom and to strengthen mutual understanding and tolerance amongst the various religious groups.

All these facts bear witness to the importance attached by Kazakhstan to the harmonious development of its society according to the principles of tolerance and mutual respect, and to the active initiatives it has undertaken to achieve this goal.

Giving legal status to religious organizations through registration

According to Kazakhstan's legislation, all religious associations are regarded as legal entities subject to legal relationships. All such legal entities have to be registered with the State, regardless of their aims, type, membership, and the character of their activities.

The purpose of making registration obligatory is to prevent religious associations from disseminating ideas calculated to bring about such things as violent change to the constitutional system, violation of the integrity of the Republic of Kazakhstan, the undermining of the security of the state, incitement to social, racial, national, religious, class and tribal enmity, and the cult of cruelty and violence. The aim of registration is to maintain public order and security. No religious association is allowed to be active unless it is registered.

The registration procedure has been made as simple as possible. Documents for the registration of associations are accepted in the Population Service Centres (PSC), which work on the one-stop service principle designed to reduce administrative barriers.

For the registration of a religious association it is necessary to submit the following:

- 1) Application for registration;*
- 2) Statutes of the association;*
- 3) Minutes of relevant meetings;*
- 4) List of initiators;*
- 5) List of the religious association's office-holders;*
- 6) Document certifying the association's location;*
- 7) Receipt for the payment of the registration fee.*

To register a small religious group it is necessary to submit:

- 1) Application for registration;*
- 2) Copy of the statutes of the fully registered religious association to which the small religious group belongs.*

Against a background of spreading religious extremism and terrorism, the example given by Kazakhstan is exceptional: particular attention is paid to the issues of how to ensure freedom of conscience and how to create conditions favourable to the development of different beliefs in an atmosphere of mutual respect and friendship.

All the necessary legal and organizational conditions for the peaceful coexistence of different religions and confessions have been created. Furthermore, Kazakhstan has formulated a national policy on religious issues, based on the following principles in particular: dissociation of religion from the State, freedom of conscience and religion, equality of religious associations, non-interference of the State in the internal affairs of religious associations, and State collaboration with religious associations.

The most important factor behind the harmonious and stable development of the country in this respect has been the sense of responsibility and inter-ethnic and inter-faith tolerance of the people of Kazakhstan, combined with their understanding that destabilization represents a serious threat to the State system and to the country's independence.

Two other features of Kazakhstan that have a positive influence on the religious situation are the dynamic development of the national economy and the generally liberal and open character of the land as a whole. Massive capital inflow, foreign best practices and experience, steadily growing welfare, and increasing opportunities to travel abroad have all contributed and continue to contribute to ever greater levels of religious toleration in Kazakhstan.

Kazakhstan's complex experience of preserving and developing inter-faith concord is of great interest for the whole OSCE community, and is one of the driving reasons behind Kazakhstan's bid for the OSCE chairmanship in 2009.

Kazakhstan firmly adheres to the principles of the OSCE human dimension, particularly those affecting citizens' rights to freedom of thought, conscience and religion.

Inter-religious dialogue is an integral part of all endeavours to promote a culture of peace and dialogue among the civilizations and the values reflected in the United Nations Millennium Declaration.

The Kazakhstan model is a striking example of how representatives of different religions and confessions can coexist peacefully.

The Director of the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights, Ambassador Christian Strohal, put it as follows: *"With its rich culture and experience of international intercourse, Kazakhstan can make an enormous contribution to the accumulation of experience in inter-ethnic and inter-faith dialogue. We all can learn from Kazakhstan, and we are interested in a possible exchange with this experience"*.

Kazakhstan has great understanding of our common responsibility and is taking an active part in the peaceful process of dialogue among civilizations.

On the basis both of its own experience and its example of inter-faith consent, Kazakhstan has created a new platform for the rapprochement of the world's religious leaders.

The Congresses of Leaders of World and Traditional Religions

In order to emphasize the importance of inter-religious dialogue, Kazakhstan held the 1st and 2nd Congresses of Leaders of World and Traditional Religions, which were attended by representatives of almost all the world's religious faiths.

These congresses and a number of international scientific and practical conferences “on inter-confessional relations” continue the tradition of inter-confessional dialogue.

The 1st Congress was held on 23–25 September 2003 in Astana, the capital of Kazakhstan.

The participants of the 1st Congress adopted a declaration confirming the essential nature of the efforts of the United Nations and other international and regional organizations, governments, and NGOs to promote dialogue between the civilizations and to strengthen co-operation on preserving spiritual values and cultivating dialogue with the aim of securing peace in the new millennium.

The 2nd Congress of Leaders of World and Traditional Religions was held on 12–13 September 2006 in Astana in the Palace of Peace and Concord that was specially built for the Forum. There were 43 delegations from 20 countries. More than 160 delegates represented all the world's religious confessions – Islam, Christianity, Judaism, Buddhism, Daoism, Shinto, and many others. In addition, representatives of such international organizations as the UN, the OSCE, UNESCO also took part in the event.



The general title of the congress was “Religion, Society and International Security”. The two thematic sessions were entitled “Freedom of faith and respect for the followers of other religions” and “The role of religious leaders in consolidating international security”.

The first day of the Forum saw the adoption of a number of “principles of inter-faith dialogue”. During the Congress the participants of the Forum were guided by the basic components of that document.

The participants at the Congress also adopted the Joint Declaration of the Second Congress of Leaders of World and Traditional Religions. The Declaration appeals to all the representatives of faiths and ethnic groups to prevent conflicts rooted in cultural and religious differences. The document reflected the global necessity to change from an “ideology of conflict” to a “culture of peace”.

On July 1-2, 2009 Astana hosted the 3rd Congress of the Leaders of World and Traditional Religions.

Over the last few years the Congress, which was initiated by President of Kazakhstan Nursultan Nazarbayev and supported by the United Nations, has been internationally recognized as an effective platform of dialogue for global peace and the advancement of tolerance, because Kazakhstan is considered as an example of a successful model for the peaceful coexistence of different ethnic and religious

communities. It has gained wide recognition from other major international fora such as the Alliance of Civilizations, the Community of St Egidio, the Asia House, the Tony Blair Foundation and many others.

Delegations from different directions of three world religions, as well as traditional religions took part in the work of the 3rd Congress. More than 60 delegations from different religious confessions, honorable guests and representatives from international organizations, such as the United Nations, Islamic Conference Organization, OSCE and UNESCO took part in the Congress. We are thankful to Secretary General of the OSCE for his response to Kazakhstan's invitation and taking part in the Congress.

The Head of State in his welcoming speech to the Congress admitted that the dialogue between the leaders of world and traditional religions, based on common aspects and exact information on each other, opens wide prospects for mutual cooperation and contributes to overcoming such negative manifestations of our time as violence, fanaticism, extremism and terrorism. This dialogue, as a means of disputes settling, was opposed to methods of violence and terror in the interdenominational and interethnic relations.

In this respect the Congress has been a major contribution by Kazakhstan to the global process of inter-cultural dialogue. An open intercultural, inter-religious dialogue is one of the key issues of Kazakhstan's internal and foreign policy. Kazakhstan has adhered and will adhere to this principle on all levels of ensuring global and regional security.

In the said regard, one of the significant initiatives of Kazakhstan, supported by the United Nations Organization, is declaration of 2010 "International Year of rapprochement of cultures".

During the two days of the Congress a wide range of issues related to the role of religious leaders in building a world based on tolerance, mutual respect and cooperation were discussed during the Congress. Sessions were devoted to such themes as: "Moral and spiritual values, and world ethics", "Dialogue and cooperation", and "Solidarity, especially in times of crisis".

During the Congress Kazakhstan proposed that the Secretariat of the Congress jointly with the International Centre of culture and religions, created in Astana, might think of an issue of creation of religious leaders Council for a dialogue and cooperation with other fora and international organizations, the activity of which be aimed at a dialogue of cultures and economic interaction. This approach was supported by the participants of the Congress.

The Forum resulted in the adoption of an "Appeal by the participants in the Third Congress of Leaders of World and Traditional Religions to the world community", calling on religious and political leaders, public figures, scientists, the mass media, and the global community to:

1. continuously support and facilitate the efforts of religious leaders and organizations towards genuine inter-religious dialogue, and to address the urgent problems of humanity so as to find proper solutions, thereby recognizing the positive role that religions can and should play in society;

2. promote comprehension of the specific character of each religion and culture and support dialogue among religions and civilizations in order to enhance mutual understanding and respect through education;

3. counteract the manipulation of religions or religious differences for political ends so as to preserve the unity of the society in the respect for legitimate diversity;

4. deepen mutual understanding by means of cultural exchanges, and cooperation in the field of education, always protecting the right of religious freedom and its effective implementation;

5. demonstrate greater moral and spiritual strength and genuine solidarity in pursuing just solutions to the economic, financial, social and environmental problems plaguing the globalized world;

In conclusion, the participants of the Congress noted that the discussions had once again demonstrated the interest of all the spiritual leaders gathered in Astana in engaging in dialogue. All the statements had reflected a common concern regarding the destiny of the world in its diversity, as well as a pursuit of ways to enhance harmony and understanding among states, nations and different religions.

The participants of the Congress, expressed gratitude to the people of the Republic of Kazakhstan and its leader for their efforts to promote a culture of concord and cooperation among peoples of different ethnic, religious and cultural backgrounds within Kazakhstan and beyond, as well as for their efforts to establish a dialogue between the followers of different religions and civilizations.

It was also decided to hold the Fourth Congress in 2012 in Astana.

Kazakhstan's initiatives on inter-confessional dialogue are not limited to such large-scale events as the congresses.

It was Kazakhstan that had the idea of convening an implementation meeting on promoting inter-cultural, inter-religious and inter-ethnic understanding in Almaty on 12–13 June 2006.

In 2007, in co-operation with the Secretariat General of the Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC), Kazakhstan hosted the conference "Islamic Civilization in Central Asia", which was devoted to questions of inter-civilization dialogue. Representatives of 23 Muslim and western countries attended the conference, notably OIC Secretary General Dr. Ekmeleddin Ihsanoglu.

The conference was a continuation of a series of similar conferences that have been held in such countries as Azerbaijan, Albania, Bulgaria, Brunei, Pakistan, Russia, Senegal, Uganda, UAE since 1986.

In 2008 Kazakhstan plans to carry on the activities of its international forum, with particular reference to the theme of dialogue between the Muslim world and the West.

Comments

Underlining the importance of the Kazakh initiative, **UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan** noted that *“religious people have an opportunity to influence individuals and groups of people and can ‘inspire’ them to serve society”*¹⁰.

Koichiro Matsuura, Director General of UNESCO, described the **Kazakh President’s initiative in holding the congresses as “a significant step to a new world where people of different religions can live together in harmony».**

Chief Ashkenazi Rabbi of Israel, Yona Metzger, thanked the President of the Republic of Kazakhstan for his important contribution to the foundation of a constructive dialogue between religions and civilizations,” noting that the initiative had “notably enhanced tolerance between representatives of Islam and Judaism”.



Vice-President of the European Parliament, **Mr. Alejo Vidal-Quadras**, had the following to say: *“There is a vast territory in Central Asia in which people of extremely different ethnic backgrounds and diverse faiths – albeit with a clear majority of Muslims – live in peace and harmony. They speak a wide variety of languages and have many different origins, tastes, sensitivities,*

*memories and habits. In spite this rich and multicoloured diversity, the relations between all these groups are excellent, they show solidarity in the sharing of common interests, objectives and efforts, and they enjoy equal rights. They fulfil the same obligations and they all, without exception, consider themselves citizens of the same State and patriots of the same Nation.”*¹¹¹²

Mutual understanding

Nowadays we are all aware of the need to overcome the myth that clashes between civilizations are unavoidable. On the contrary, every measure taken to unite the creative efforts of religious figures makes a huge contribution to mastering the problem of global conflict.

The Congresses of Leaders of World and Traditional Religions put on by Kazakhstan are an effective step on the road to peace talks and constructive

¹⁰ An official web-site of the President of the Republic of Kazakhstan – www.akorda.kz

¹¹ From the speech of Vice-President of the European Parliament Mr. Alejo Vidal-Quadras. December 2006, Madrid.

co-operation between religions. They are an original platform for tolerance principles and for discussion of relations between the world's faiths and traditional religions.

The overall objective of the Congresses is to harness the positive experience of the world's traditional faiths for the building up of constructive mutual relationships between world religions. As such, they constitute an inventive continuation of the dialogue of the civilizations.

The special importance of these forums is that they are held under the aegis of a secular state, making it possible for representatives of various faiths to participate.

When a congress is forthcoming, it is clear to all that it is not being put on to serve the purposes of one religion. On the contrary, the congresses pursue the goal of conducting a "secular" dialogue among religions, the basic themes of discussion being the universal problems now faced by mankind all over the world. The aim is to explore how the spiritual and moral potential of world religions can be used in such areas as decision-making in international conflicts, in counteracting global threats, and the overcoming of xenophobia and intolerance.

All the world's religious communities should be aware that the congresses can strengthen the influence of all faiths. Everyone has something to gain from them.

In the course of the 2nd Congress, Nursultan Nazarbayev, the President of the Republic of Kazakhstan, proposed to the leaders of world and traditional religions that they should deliver lectures once a year at the Palace of Peace and Concord. As he said, "If world leaders of Islam, Christianity, Buddhism, Hinduism, Daoism, Judaism, Confucianism or Shintoism bring their words of peace and concord to my compatriots every year, that will be one of brightest spiritual events in the whole of Eurasia."

Since then it has become a good tradition for leaders of various religions to meet with scientists, journalists, young people and representatives of Kazakh NGOs to talk to them about communicating spiritual values and promoting spiritual culture, showing what morals and ethical principles the world's faiths have in common, and delivering words of peace and good will to thousands of people in Kazakhstan.

Such distinguished religious figures as the President of the World Council of Cultural Heritage Zaratustra Dr. Khomi Dkhalla, Velikopreslavsky Metropolitan Kirill of the Bulgarian Orthodox Church, former Catholic archbishop of Washington Cardinal Teodor Edgar McKerik, and Mohammad Umar Gautam, professor of the Islamic research department of the Jamia Millia Islamia University have visited Kazakhstan and have lectured on a wide variety of themes such as violence in the world today and the imagined clash between the Islamic and Christian civilizations.

The Hare Krishna issue

Recently the Kazakhstan authorities found themselves the object of destructive criticism in the international mass media on account of alleged persecution of the Hare Krishna movement for religious reasons.

However, the core of the problem lies in certain legal issues.

The "Hare Krishna movement" in Almaty was responsible for a number of breaches of the law, notably through its non-observance of national construction standards, of fire, sanitary and ecology safety standards, and of passport and registration rules. The organization erected several cult buildings without obtaining proper permission from local authorities. In this way, the "Hare Krishna movement" caused considerable tension in its relationships with the neighbouring population.

In accordance with national legislation, concrete charges were brought against particular persons for concrete actions.

At the same time, a special arbitration commission was set up, giving special consideration the particular status of Hare Krishna movement. Amongst the members of the commission were representatives of the OSCE centre in Almaty, the Helsinki Committee, the International Bureau of Human Rights, and of government agencies. Their official decision declared the actions of the executive and the courts to have been in accord with the law. The commission's conclusions were presented to local and foreign mass media during a special briefing on 5 January 2007.

It should be emphasized that eleven religious communities of the "Hare Krishna movement" are registered in seven different regions and in the cities of Astana and Almaty. Moreover, the community has refused offers from the local authorities of other plots of land for the construction of their cult buildings.

The criticism levelled at Kazakhstan by certain human rights organizations resulted from lack of knowledge of the real situation. Any country governed by the rule of law requires its citizens to respect court orders and the execution of those orders. Like all other civilized and constitutional countries, the Republic of Kazakhstan guarantees all its citizens human rights such as freedom of conscience and religious freedom, but at the same time demands that all its citizens, regardless of their beliefs, respect the law of the land.

Did you know . . .

. . . that Kazakhstan is the largest country with a predominantly Moslem population and also the northernmost Moslem country with a secular system of government?

. . . that Alexander Mashkevich – the President of the Euro-Asian Jewish Congress and a member of the Executive Committee of the European Jewish Congress – is a citizen of the Republic of Kazakhstan?

. . . that Kordai granite from Kazakhstan was used in the construction of the famous Cathedral of Christ the Saviour in Moscow?

. . . that the Palace of Peace and Concord was built specifically for the meetings of the leaders of the world's religions?



leaders are to take place.

The Palace of Peace and Concord

The building was designed by the famous British architect Norman Foster. It has the form of a pyramid. Its first levels are occupied by the opera house (seating 1500). The pyramid is 62 metres high and base is 62 metres square. It contains ample space for meetings and conferences. The top of the pyramid contains a round hall with 200 seats, where the meetings of the world's religious



The Nur-Astana Mosque

The central mosque of Astana has four minarets, each being 62 metres high. The Nur-Astana Mosque has room for five thousand believers inside and two thousand outside on the square in front.



The Beit-Rahel-Habbad Lyubavich Synagogue

The largest synagogue in Kazakhstan and Central Asia was founded in Astana on 7 September 2004. It has a total area of 5600 square metres.



Svyatovoznesenskii Cathedral

The construction of this building was a unique feat of engineering. It is 56 metres high and it is made of blue tyan-shan fir. It was designed by the architect A. Zenkov in 1904.



The Cathedral of the Vergin of Perpetual Help of Astana
In Pope John Paul II for the first time visited Kazakhstan.