

UPF Yekaterinburg, Russia: Interfaith Discussion Links Conscience to Values

Maria Nazarova
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Yekaterinburg, Russia -- Representatives of three major religions spoke at a webinar dedicated to the International Day of Conscience.

On April 6, 2021, the online conference "Ways to Strengthen Interreligious and Interethnic Peace" was held by UPF and its constituent association Interreligious Association for Peace and Development (IAPD), in cooperation with the non-governmental organization Great Country.

About 95 people participated in the webinar through Zoom and other social media. Afterward, the webinar received more than 2,000 views on YouTube and other social media.

Speakers

Islam: Khadzhimurat-Khadzhi, mufti, chairman of the Spiritual Administration of Muslims of the Russian Republic of North Ossetia-Alania; co-chairman of the Coordination Center for Muslims of the North Caucasus; member of the strategic vision group Russia-Islamic World;

Christianity: Father Sergiy Kartavin, a priest of the Russian Orthodox Church, a cleric of the Church of the Nativity of Christ in the southwestern Russia city of Armavir, and an assistant to the dean for religious education and catechesis;

Buddhism: Zorigto Lama, abbot of the Ust-Orda District Datsan (Buddhist Traditional Sangha); member of the Public Chamber of the Irkutsk Region (Siberia).

Co-organizer (NGO): Nikolai V. Kizimov, head of the Great Country spiritual and moral educational center and co-organizer of this webinar.

The moderator of the webinar, Maria Nazarova, the head of UPF-Russia, spoke about the UN-created International Day of Conscience. She emphasized that sincerely believing people whose conscience is fueled by a relationship with God, or Allah, or a supreme being (who may be called differently by different religions) have enormous potential in not only setting the standard of morality in society, but also to be real peacemakers, Ambassadors for Peace, wherever they go.

Khadzhimurat-Khadzhi (Islam): "I want to thank you for organizing these webinars, for the opportunity to speak up. This is a great job for our country. Morality is a relevant topic; it is necessary for our environment and for ourselves. The things that we have chosen -- the fundamental things -- are awareness, love for our neighbor, and love for the motherland. These are the fundamental foundations on which we were brought up. Today all of this is blurring. These are the fundamental foundations on which a great country took place. The question of morality is the most painful question that always faces civilization. When there is a moral problem, then we become weaker and the problems that we are experiencing are stronger than us.

"Humanity is the gift of the Almighty to us people. Philanthropy is what we stand on and take place on. And today philanthropy and our entire system of values are becoming questionable, being destroyed, eroding. Our generation is losing the point of coordinates -- who to believe and who to follow. You rightly said that, first of all, it is work, the duty of religious people. All religions are different. We are from the same Lord, and our base is identical. Our duty is to preserve the morality of the people.

"We, by the will of the Almighty, are endowed with an essence, a soul, and we must not dissolve in this environment today, we must unite. All these things are the moral bonds of our country. We must not let them shake. I call on all religious people to unite. We have one platform, we have one country, we have one people, and today we are most responsible for those young souls who are losing their orientation today.

"I would like us to unite and think about what we want, where we are going, what we want to do to strengthen our youth, so that in the future there will be no inclinations in this direction.

"There are two things on which human life is based -- it is physical security and spiritual security. You and I are responsible for this spiritual security. Safety is one of the factors that give the continuation of life, give work to our mind, preserve dignity and honor and those good, light feelings that we have. Without security -- there will be none of this. Life becomes meaningless without the Lord God in your

soul.

"I would like us to unite and put a tough barrier on this system. We are told that there is no national idea. There is -- this is morality, this is morality, it is eternal, it is outside of time, it is outside of political systems. It is indispensable to the human being. We must make it our national idea. Morality is, above all, respect and love for a person."

Father Sergiy Kartavin (Christianity): "Now Orthodox believers are fasting [during the Lenten season before Easter]. This is not a time of restrictions, but a time of opportunities to become closer to God, help others, and fulfill the commandments.

"Religion penetrates into many zones of human activity and occupies one of the leading positions in them. A person makes decisions based on religiosity and conscience. Even atheists who do not recognize the presence of higher powers, in moments of despair seek intercession from higher powers.

"Russia was originally created as a multinational state, and it is now. Every citizen has guarantees of freedom of development and freedom of speech; we have no restrictions on religion. We are very similar, because we have many common traditions. Our strength of our people lies in dialogue. It is in dialogue that we must develop and grow. We have many values -- respect for elders, care for others. This is inherent in each of us. These moral values allow us to see like-minded people in each other. Following this dialogue, it becomes clear that all our interreligious strife does not occur because of the difference in religions, but from completely different things that have nothing to do with faith. They are trying to tie religious laws to extremism, but faith has nothing to do with it.

"In such dialogues, I would like to get to know each other better, get acquainted with the faith of other people, and find common ground. Here we will meet like-minded people and friends. Such dialogues contribute to the development of trust in each other.

"The conditions for such a dialogue can take place not only at the conference but also between people who are not so churchy, but nevertheless, the main rule for them should be respect and equal positions. These are two conditions that guarantee people the opportunity to understand and hear each other correctly. So we can find ways for the development of our country and the world.

"All major traditional confessions are collected in Russia. This traditionally unites us. Another thing that can unite us is the tragic experience of states that have disintegrated. If we want to preserve our country and give a good experience to our descendants, we must unite. Our ancestors united and performed heroic deeds. Many of them are glorified as saints and are our intercessors before God.

"Interreligious relations are like a nuclear dialogue. If everything is used correctly, then nuclear technology has a positive effect. A person can achieve a lot. But if used incorrectly, it will be like a nuclear bomb that can wipe out the people from the face of the earth. We must respect and love our neighbor, respect his choice and his traditions.

"Modern Russia is an example of a high level of tolerance, because multinational and multi-religious people have been living here since ancient times, and we all united when threatened. We can unite through religion, unite our culture, unite our common efforts. All these centuries have shown that we live and have lived together in peace and harmony. We need to keep these traditions and try not to deviate from them."

Zorigto Lama (Buddhism): "The Day of Conscience is very important for all of us in the era of material development, because we cannot lose the world of spirituality. We are experiencing a spiritual decline today. An important mission lies on the shoulders of the clergy: the preservation of the spiritual life of their people.

"We understand that now people can accept the influence of different subcultures, Western influence, and it certainly affects our young generation and raises concerns for the future.

"With the help of dialogue, statements of wise, important words, you can reach out to young people and convey an important mission to them. There is a very useful experience when priests meet together at roundtables, among young people, on holidays, and talk about values.

"We are all people, we are all born in the same way, we suffer from the same diseases, we all die; what should divide us?"

"The world of spirituality has been established since ancient times. There are spiritual leaders, mentors, teachers. If we look at what kind of people they were, we will understand that they lived for the sake of others, were merciful, compassionate; they had boundless love for others, for those around them, for their comrades-in-arms. They were willing to give their lives and their health for the good of others. They are examples of how to follow the path. They were religious people, but they conveyed wise values. On the shoulders of the clergy lies the responsibility to convey these wise words. We must show by our behavior that the world of spirituality is what we need for a happy and prosperous life -- not wealth, not money, but

inner peace, harmony of the soul. In order for the material world not to close the world of spirituality, we need to remind our young generation so that they do not confuse these two concepts. The world of spirituality is much more important and significant than the material world. Of course, we need the material world, but we do not need to go there headlong and forget about morality and ethics. We can harm with body, speech and mind. We need to make sure that our body, speech and mind do not harm living beings."

Nikolai Vasilyevich Kizimov: "If we convince 100 or 200 people and make them supporters of our ideas, then they may also tell someone about it.

"Poem:

"All nations are equal before God,

"It can't be otherwise

"No one should rise.

"This is how the Lord commanded us to live.

"One of the dangers that the priests talked about is separation. One of the devil's rules is to divide and conquer, either by religion or by skin color. There are no division limits.

"Religion is a union with God. This can only be in accordance with the religions that are close to our people. A sect is when they take one quote and attach their ideology to it.

"The commandments determine -- not to let Satan or shaitan [evil spirits of Islamic belief] into the soul. You need to keep the faith of your ancestors holy and not give in to the teachings of false prophets. Our religions have been around for centuries, and there is no need to drive a wedge into our relationship. You need to live in peace, love and harmony.

"Spiritual security comes first; military security comes second. Many peoples have wisdom: If you want to defeat the enemy, you do not need to fight with him; start raising his children and impose your values. Then an internecine war will begin within. We must unite.

"When I studied scientific atheism, I noticed that a lot is taken from the scriptures, simply interpreted. Soviet textbooks on the study of psychology say that 'logos' is science, and 'psychos' is the soul. How could one study the soul while ignoring God?

"Our faith -- the faith of our main religions -- must pass all these tests and be strengthened.

"Conscience is a spiritual state in a person, before an intellectual one.

"Natural difficulties, they unite people. By our example, we must show the peacemaking mission of our religions. We must strengthen our interreligious and interethnic relations."

Questions and answers:

Is it possible to draw a connection between the level of morality in society and the quality of life of people?

Khadzhimurat-Khadzhi: "Definitely a direct link. There is morality -- this is what is sent to us by God and is what we broadcast to people. We were all raised in a great country, but it abandoned God and had no perspective.

"The religions that are present here -- have been present here for millennia. We have been conducting a dialogue for a long time, and we have never been at enmity. In the history of Russia, there has been no confrontation with religion. Today we need to move on to collaboration. The biggest milestone will be if we can make our fellow believers work in the same way with a neighbor, not just as a person, with sympathy that exists, but as a person who believes in the Lord God. If we introduce this concept of a God-fearing person, then that he must be respected, regardless of confession or religion, this will be a big step forward.

"Without God, a nation is a crowd.

"Burdened with vice

"Or blind or deaf

"Or what is even more terrible -- cruel.

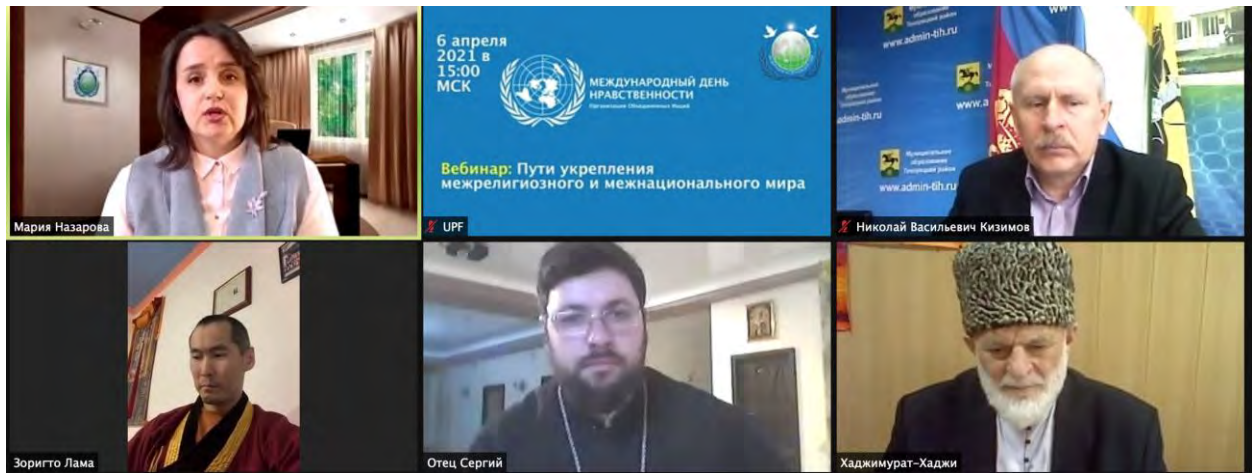
"And may anyone ascend to the throne who speaks in a high syllable

"The crowd will remain a crowd

"Until it turns to God.

"This is the meaning of our life,

"We need to tell people to turn to God"



Dr. Alexander Shapiro Suleiman (Judaism): At the moment when Western values are coming to our country, how do you think, in Russia and the post-Soviet space, we can keep society and the younger generation from the lack of spirituality and immorality?

Nikolai V. Kizimov: "Of course, we can. Firstly, we need to conduct explanatory work; spiritual values should be established from childhood; we need cooperation with the education system. We need to prevent permissiveness. Democracy is not interpreted in the version that was originally laid down in it. Freedom of choice is the freedom to be good and to do good, not something that I made up for myself.

"To unite our peoples and religions, we need a single approach. For black you need to say 'black,' and for white -- 'white.' There must be clarity. And democracy should be where there is no destruction of the foundations of the state."

Father Sergiy Kartavin: "I would like to approach this issue as a practitioner and address the parents. We must rely on children, be interested in their moral education. We can do a lot of seminars and tell a lot of the right things, but I would like to appeal to parents so that they show the beauty of faith and righteousness by their personal example. Because whatever you say, the child is watching. If he sees that parents respect other people and are honest with each other, then he will be the same. If he sees other pictures in the family, then these pictures will also be in his life. And no matter what, a person will be lost, both in the spiritual space and in the world; he will not absorb the foundations that we want to convey. I want to appeal to the parents and ask them to convey this example -- how a believer should act.

"We need to find time for our children. We must be an authority for them; then a person can raise his children in the same way. But more often it happens that we are busy, we need to work, and we do not have time for our children. Everyone has their own business, we come home and are tired. Our children expect from us what we can tell them, but they see that we are no longer able to. So they ask other people questions and look in the wrong places where they can get the right answer.

"When a child at the age of 15 does not obey, then this is already a complete stranger. It was necessary to educate earlier. Many people say that we will send the child to school and he will be smart, but, in fact, you need to communicate with the child. If we take him to church and pray, it does not mean that he will grow up like that."

Khadzhimurat-Khadzhi: "It's clear that parents and family are fundamental. Now we have a structure -- a person, then a society, then a state. It should be the other way around. A person has rights unambiguously, but he also has responsibilities. If the state does not understand that it is structure-forming, if it does not turn to that simple dogma that any moral thing does not come from somewhere, it comes from the Lord. People understand morality, shame, conscience, but they do not associate this with the Lord. When a person realizes that all this is the providence of the Lord, then he will understand that there is responsibility. Until we introduce responsibility into society, before the family, before society, the state, we will continue to float in an amorphous situation."

Sergey from Chukotka: Do you think there are enough representatives of traditional religions on the Internet and social networks now? Are we not losing the information war for the younger generation?

Nikolai V. Kizimov: "Of course, we are losing this war. We do not have enough competent ideology; sometimes we do not have enough state resources. Therefore, we need to unite our religions, and people's diplomacy can sometimes be more than a state resource.

"We must ideologically shoehorn and strengthen the younger generation.

"Word can kill, word can save

"in a word, you can lead the regiments behind you.

"Therefore, we need to teach children to analyze words.

"You need to be a patriot, teach this to children. Patriotism is not just a word, but a state of mind."