

## Multi-Ethnic and Multi-Confessional Accord

President of the Republic of Kazakhstan Mr. Nursultan A. Nazarbayev:

*«Internal and external policies go hand-in-hand. If all is not well in your own house, you have no moral right to ask your neighbours to behave. On the contrary, when you realise how hard it is to preserve the peace and harmony that you have achieved, it makes you anxious to protect them from any external irritants».*

Multi-ethnic and multi-confessional tensions and conflicts in different parts of the world has become a serious concern for policymakers, religious and public figures.

For the multi-ethnic and multi-confessional Kazakhstan tolerance and constructive cooperation in this delicate sphere is not just the norm of everyday life and political culture, but also an part of our national strategy.

Kazakhstan, the country hosting over 130 ethnicities, is one of the few states in the post- Soviet area which has avoided the scenario of balkanisation and interethnic conflicts. This situation is in many ways linked to the activity of President of Kazakhstan Nursultan Nazarbayev; in 1992, at the first Forum of the Peoples of Kazakhstan, he put forward the idea of creating an **Assembly of the Peoples of Kazakhstan**, a new body for national and ethnic politics that has taken over one of the central positions in the country's public and political arena.

Under amendments made to the Constitution in May 2007, the Assembly has been given a new status and the organisation now has 9 deputies in the Majilis, the lower house of Parliament. All legislative acts adopted by Parliament will from now on undergo additional scrutiny for their compliance with the criteria of interethnic reconciliation, tolerance and equality.

On 20 October 2008 the President signed the law On the Assembly of the Peoples of Kazakhstan. This was an admission of the great role that the Assembly plays in preserving peace and harmony not only in Kazakhstan or in the Central Asian Region. It is a unique law that has no parallels anywhere else in the world, and will be very important for the future of the country. Congress of Leaders of World and Traditional Religions has been a major contribution by Kazakhstan to the global process of inter-cultural and inter-religious dialogue. Kazakhstan's initiative, which is supported by the UN, is a very timely measure. Over the last few years the Congress has gained wide recognition from other major international forums, such as the Alliance of Civilisations, the Community of St Egidio, Asia House and the Tony Blair Foundation, which all have expressed their intention to participate in its work.

The third Congress of World and Traditional Religions is to be held in Astana on 1-2 July 2009. It is proposed that the theme of the plenary session of the Congress should be identified as 'The Role of Religious Leaders in Building a Tolerant World in Conditions of Globalisation'. These would include moral values, peace and security, the environment and harmony, genuine dialogue and cooperation, and promoting justice.

The Palace of Peace and Reconciliation in Astana designed by British architect Lord Norman Foster was built in record time – just one year especially for holding the Second Congress of Leaders of World and Traditional Religions and further events related to inter-ethnic and inter-confessional issues.

On October 17, 2008, the **Foreign Ministerial Conference “Common World: Progress through Diversity”** took place in Astana, which was attended by Foreign Ministers and other official representatives of more than 65 countries and international organizations.

During open and fruitful debates, the ways of deepening of understanding between the Muslim world and the West were addressed; hotbeds of instability in modern world and possibility of establishing lasting peace and stability; sources of islamophobia xenophobia, and 'westernophobia', enhancing the tolerance, issues of media activity. Discussions focused on problems, such as modern education, role

of youth and women in strengthening the peer dialogue, human rights. The Conference was concluded with adoption of the Astana Declaration, calling upon to unite on the basis of diversity.

Astana believes that the human dimension is fundamental in the OSCE work and considers it to be one of the most important pillars of its future role as the Organization's political leader.

Kazakhstan supported the establishment of three Personal representatives of the Chairman-in-Office on religious tolerance: for anti-Semitism, Muslims and for Christians and other religions. Freedom of conscience and religious tolerance are amongst the core principles, which the OSCE follows.

Kazakhstan is planning to use this unique opportunity to enter on the agenda issues on strengthening the tolerance and continuation of the efforts of member-states in fight against with all forms of discrimination as the key points of OSCE agenda.