

THREE FAITHS FORUM



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PRESS RELEASE

THE THREE FAITHS FORUM MEET UZBEKISTAN'S RELIGIOUS LEADERS

Religious leaders from Uzbekistan gave an encouraging picture of interreligious co-operation in their country at a seminar arranged by the Three Faiths Forum held on Thursday 31st May 2007 at the Embassy of Uzbekistan. Participants were welcomed by the Ambassador, HE Mr Tukhtapulat Riskiev, and by Sir Sigmund Sternberg, Co-founder of the Three Faiths Forum.

Sheikh Azizjon Mansur, Vice Chairman of Uzbekistan Board of Muslims, spoke of Islam's teaching of respect for other believers and the long tradition of religious tolerance in their country. "There has been a revival of religion since independence from Soviet rule" he said. "Today people of all religions have equal rights. In 2007 Tashkent was declared one of the four capitals of Islamic culture by ICESCO".

"The government is committed to restoring historical religious sites" Dr Siddhart Saxena, Chairman of Cambridge Central Asia Forum emphasised, when speaking about religious life in Bukhara where he had lived for some time and conducted a scientific research on unique Eastern cosmopolitanism of this ancient town.

Father Sergey Statsenko, Vice-Chancellor of the Tashkent Orthodox Christian Seminary and Dr Roman Bensman, Vice-Chairman of the Tashkent Jewish Religious Community both spoke of the recent renewal and growth of their respective communities. In 1996 a Tashkent grammar school which provides for the study of Hebrew and Jewish traditions was opened. Jewish holidays are publicly celebrated. Two synagogues in Tashkent have been reconstructed and the old synagogues in Samarkand and Bukhara have been largely restored. Father Sergey underlined the thousand years history of co-existence, mutual assistance and generosity of Christians and Muslims in the land of Uzbekistan. These relations are preserved and even more developed nowadays Uzbekistan, where both communities celebrate together their religious holidays, maintain common spiritual values through education and try to build their future as solid society.

In his closing remarks, Sidney Shipton, Coordinator of the Three Faiths Forum, said that he was well aware of some of the criticisms of Uzbekistan made in certain circles but that the Three Faiths Forum existed in the spirit of dialogue. "Understanding only comes when one listens and the religious leaders from Uzbekistan gave an encouraging picture of interreligious co-operation in Uzbekistan. Mr Shipton suggested that out of this seminar should come the setting up of a Three Faiths Forum in Uzbekistan.

Amongst those present were Sir Anthony Figgis, Marshal of HM Diplomatic Corp, representatives of the Embassies of USA, Russia, Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan, of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office as well as leading members of the Three Faiths Forum and academics from several universities.

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