

MINISTRY OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS OF THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION



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Transcript of Remarks and Replies to Media Questions by Russian Minister of Foreign Affairs Sergey Lavrov at Press Conference Following Talks with Representatives of Russian Muslim Community, February 26, 2006

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Foreign Minister Lavrov: Esteemed colleagues,

Russian Muslims have long since established ties with the Organization of the Islamic Conference. Now that Russia as a country has acquired observer status in it, we can for our cause's sake further the decisions which are taken in the Organization, including the immensely important decision on the need for tolerance, on the inadmissibility of using a religion for the cover up of terrorism and on the inadmissibility of associating terrorism with any religion.

We also have quite a few important tasks in relation to the upcoming G8 summit in St. Petersburg. As part of the preparations for it, a whole array of events involving religious leaders is planned, including the culmination of this work - the upcoming World Summit of Religious Leaders in Moscow at the start of July. Russian Muslims will participate most actively in this series of important events.

We also discussed the entirely practical aspects of our cooperation, which is tied to religious Muslim education in Russia, primarily where our engagement is concerned with a view to the normal organization of the processes of the training of our citizens abroad. We have a number of specific agreements on how the Foreign Ministry can help to carry out this work in an organized way for the sake of the development in the country of true Islam, not polluted by interpretations which have nothing in common with this great religion.

As to issues related to conflicts in different regions of the world, which, unfortunately, some people are increasingly trying to treat in terms of inter-civilizational encounters, we affirm the identity of our positions both on Palestinian-Israeli settlement and on the necessity of resolving the situation around Iraq, Afghanistan, Syria, Lebanon and Iran's nuclear program solely by peaceful, negotiating, generally acceptable means. We agreed that on all these issues we shall continue and intensify our information exchanges and the exchange of assessments. I am convinced that this will be an important stage in the further development of our cooperation.

The Foreign Ministry will do all it can for Russian Muslims to be able to communicate more effectively and regularly with their coreligionists abroad, including the arrangement of Hajjs. This collaboration is very important for the Ministry, because it enables us to consider more and better the interests of a large portion of the Russian population.

Question: Do you plan meeting leaders of other religious faiths soon?

Foreign Minister Lavrov: We regularly hold such meetings. We meet with the leadership of the Russian Orthodox Church and with leaders of Russian Jewish communities. We are engaged in regular dialogue with all the major faiths. In addition, we actively participate in the events which our faiths' leaders themselves arrange within the framework of their cooperation among them, including the preparation of the World Summit of Religious Leaders we today talk about.

Question: Russian-Iranian talks concerning the Iranian nuclear problem ended in Teheran yesterday. Was any progress achieved?

Foreign Minister Lavrov: There were talks yesterday in Iran on all the issues of bilateral economic, commercial, scientific and technical cooperation between Russia and Iran. The cochairman of the Intergovernmental Commission, the head of Rosatom, Sergey Kiriyyenko led our delegation. The question of Iran's nuclear program also was touched on. Contacts on this theme will continue up to the next session of the IAEA Board of Governors to be held in Vienna on March 6.

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A video recording of the press conference is posted on the Russian MFA's website in the Video section (<http://www.mid.ru>).

February 26, 2006