INTER-RELIGIOUS DIALOGUE

SPECIAL REPORT | 9 - 15 OCTOBER 2018
http://eurac.tv/9PNc

With the support of THE ASTANA TIMES
Located at a crossroads of different civilizations, Kazakhstan has placed great importance on promoting religious harmony and mutual respect.

This year the country is hosting the sixth edition of the Congress of the Leaders of World and Traditional Religions, an initiative which has its roots in the aftermath of the 9/11 terrorist attacks.
Contents

Religion should not be used to sow divisions 4
Kazakh researcher: EU is like a dog with an Elizabethan collar 6
Religious leaders raise their flags at Astana gathering 9
A message from Astana: EU, be alert, the fascists are coming 11
Church leader: John Paul II left a legacy in Kazakhstan 13
In recent years, many thousands have died and millions more had to flee their homes due to conflicts in which religion has been used to justify discrimination and violence. Countering these dangerous distortions is one of the challenges that religious leaders will address in Astana on 10 and 11 October, writes Kassym-Jomart Tokayev.

Kassym-Jomart Tokayev is a career diplomat, chairman of Kazakhstan’s Senate and head of the Secretariat of the Congress of the Leaders of World and Traditional Religions.

Religion has been, and remains, an immense spiritual force for good in our world. The shared values which underpin all world’s major faiths have positively moulded how we treat each other. Religious beliefs give direction, comfort and hope to billions of people. Religious communities appear to have enormous potential for addressing today’s social problems. Faith groups across the globe are prominent in feeding the hungry, sheltering the homeless and caring for the vulnerable. Our world would be

Continued on Page 5
Continued from Page 4

poorer without the impact of religion on our lives.
Throughout history, religion has also been exploited to sow divisions. Instead of bringing people together and encouraging them to behaving decently toward each other, it has been abused to fuel suspicions and hatred, spread confusion about the true essence of religion. We are facing the problem of ignoring what religions have in common and exaggerating and distorting the difference between, and at times within, faiths.

The abuse of religion continues and is undermining hopes for peace and progress. In recent years, many thousands have died and millions more had to flee their homes in conflicts, in which religion has been used to justify discrimination and violence. Countering these dangerous distortions is one of the challenges that religious leaders should address.

There is no single answer. Yet at the heart of the solution is dialogue between religions to foster understanding and respect. This is an overarching aim of the Congress of the Leaders of World and Traditional Religions which is to be held for the sixth time in Kazakhstan's capital Astana this month (October.)
The Congress was initiated by Kazakh President Nursultan Nazarbayev amid the growing religious tensions and extremism following the 9/11 terrorist attack in the United States. He believed it was critical that the opportunity be provided for religious leaders to work together to prevent religion being used to divide us.

His vision has struck a chord across the world. The Congress, which takes place every three years since 2003 has engaged prominent religious leaders and politicians from different countries around most pressing issues. By 2015, the number of delegations attending had increased from 23 to 80. High-profile attendees included then UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon, King Abdullah of Jordan and President of Finland Sauli Niinistö. Discussions centred on the role of religion in promoting development and measures to reduce appeal of violent extremism among young people.

The Sixth Congress, which takes place on October 10-11, will build on this efforts. Its focus is on how religious leaders can work together to play their full part in creating a secure world and prevent faith being abused to set people against each other.

Located at a crossroads of different civilizations, Kazakhstan has placed greater importance on promoting religious harmony and mutual respect. Our country's history and geography have combined to create a society in which people of many different backgrounds and faiths live within single boundaries. Religious freedom has become a precious asset of our nation, which allows diverse beliefs to peacefully coexist and helps us to negotiate any concerns in a constructive spirit.

Such a mixture could have been, as it has been the case in other countries, a worrying source of tension and conflict. Despite negative expectations such diversity has been turned into a strength in our society where citizens are equally respected and are able to make their full contribution to the common welfare.

As a matter of fact, while Kazakhstan's population may be largely Muslim, followers of all traditional faiths live in harmony with each other, are free to worship and enjoy equal rights guaranteed by the constitution. It is a source not only of national pride but has also been an indispensable platform for our stability and prosperity at home and growing influence abroad.

In this turbulent world, dialogue and mutual respect has never been more important. Nor has it been more critical to provide the forum where religious and political leaders can work together to prevent any distortion of faith for violent ends. The upcoming Congress is so vital for peace and prosperity.
Kazakhstan has succeeded where the EU has failed – creating a society based on multiculturalism, Sagintay Berdaulova told EURACTIV in an interview.

Sagintay Berdaulova is Lead Researcher of the Library of the First President of Kazakhstan in Astana.

She spoke to EURACTIV Senior Editor Georgi Gotev.

We speak just before the opening of the Congress of the Leaders of World and Traditional Religions which is will be held for the sixth time Astana, on 10 and 11 October. Tell us about this initiative.

The first such meeting took place in 2003, not so long after Kazakhstan

Continued on Page 7
formed itself as a new state, in 1991. This was an initial period of positioning of our country in world affairs, it was part of defining our values.

Obviously this was about positioning Kazakhstan as a peace-loving country, but also about solving internal problems via this international positioning. We are a very multi-ethnic country, and although we have had no difficulty preserving our internal peace, we live in an ever more dangerous world, and influences are possible.

The world is no longer what it was 70 years ago, when World War 2 ended and the international scene was occupied by politicians. Maybe it’s time to think about spiritual, humanitarian values, of which traditionally religions have been the exponent. Maybe it’s time to create a new paradigm for relations between humans, to move away from confrontation. By the way, at one of the previous Congresses it was proposed that the culture of peace should replace the culture of confrontation.

I think it’s very courageous for a country to take the lead for such a mission, but for us it’s natural, because we are used to live at the crossroads of cultures, religions.

**If we look at the map, Kazakhstan is quite close to Afghanistan and Pakistan – a very different world to say the least. What is the risk for extremism be imported in Kazakhstan?**

Unfortunately such a danger exists, nobody is protected, our territory is big, our borders are very long, in addition internet shortens the distances even more. Unfortunately we have had people who got caught in those traps, some people went to Syria to support extremist movements. But this is also why we try to contribute to making the world a safer place, also by being a safe and stable place in our region.

This is why our President has for many years been proposing initiatives for Afghanistan. We give Afghan students grants so that they could obtain good education in Kazakhstan, and also gain from acquiring a culture of communication with people from other parts of the world, from other civilisations. I’m sure these people, who were only used to seeing foreigners as colonizers, have experienced a very different attitude toward themselves. We are yet to see what the initiative will produce, but creating relations in a non-mentor style is important.

**What do you think of the so-called international community, it is obviously not doing enough to fight religious extremism? Let’s take an example, what do you think of the action of the EU to help solve the problems you describe?**

I will say something that may sound outrageous, but I think the EU sometimes acts as if it was dog with an Elizabethan collar. You know, those collars they put on dogs [when they have an injury]. The dog sees the world through this funnel and believes that what it sees is the world. [The EU] only sees what they want to see, they are not looking left or right, first because they don’t think it’s necessary, and second, because they are afraid of what they could see. Because what they could see is very likely to create the urgency of doing something about it.

Another reason is that the EU is in an internal crisis situation, with its own citizens, and externally, a good example being the transatlantic relations. Moreover, the EU is at crossroads: how will it evolve in the future? Will the new members be kicked out? Will only old members remain?

**After World War 2, when the economic conditions were good, some 3 million Turks were invited to Germany, and a few hundred thousands of Moroccans to Belgium. Why after so many years were the vast majority of these people not integrated? Why are some so hostile to the West?**

It’s like if your family has invited a guest: everything will depend on how heartily you will welcome him, this will determine his attitude toward you. In Europe, there has been a tradition of people being confined in their landscape, be it the Alps, the Pyrenees, living in their small environment, with their customs, values. The Europeans already find it difficult to communicate between themselves. In my view the same tradition is strongly influencing the attitude toward much more alien people. In addition, there has never been an objective to integrate those people. In the beginning it was assumed that they come to work, and later they will return home.

So what is called tolerance amounts to patience out of necessity. In Kazakhstan it’s different, for a number of reasons we are more friendly, more well-wishing to those of foreign origin. This is why even if we have isolated radicals, they cannot form a community. The correct way of achieving multiculturalism is not creating an alloy, a composition metal, it’s about creating a mosaic of people representing different civilisations.

**Can you formulate some advice to the West?**

Here we come back to your first question: why does Astana host such gatherings of leaders of the different religions? We are used to being surrounded by different cultures. We live in the steppe, we are not divided by mountains, by natural barriers. The fact that we lived in the Soviet Union, a multi-nation state, has also played a role. Populations have been brought there artificially, there have
been [Soviet] initiatives to develop the ‘Virgin Lands’ [In Russian, ‘Tselina’, the Soviet-times name of Astana was Tselinograd], but this has taught us that peoples are necessary one to another. We have always had a lot of land, but too few people. So a newcomer was always precious. And in our ancient history, we didn’t have capital punishment, because each person was precious.

In the last 26-27 years, if we have been successful, as independent Kazakhstan, it’s thanks to this mosaic, and we realise this.

You gave as example the Soviet legacy in a positive way, but the same legacy has created wounds elsewhere, like in Nagorno-Karabakh, and there is no recipe how these could heal. What is your comment?

Armenia is a very mono-ethnic country. Even in Soviet times 90% of the population were Armenians. In contrast, Kazakhs in Kazakhstan during Soviet times were less than 40%. The rest: Russians, Ukrainians, Polish, German, Tatars, Uzbeks, are all ours. The ensuing inter-dependence, mutual support, also were formed in severe climatic conditions, with minus 40 degrees in the winter and plus 40 in the summer. A few weeks ago we organized a round table, the Ambassador of Armenia was also present and said its country will withhold this place d’armes even with the use of military force. For the Kazakh mentality such language is unusual.

Kazakhstan has excellent relations with Turkey, but Turkey is also changing. How do you see this change?

It’s a difficult question. A couple of years ago I could say that Turkey is trying to fend off various perceived attacks. Today I can say that Turkey got rid of its inferiority complex of being a hopeful to join the EU. And a re-orientation in term of values takes place in parallel. Turkey probably feels self-sufficient and consequently is redefining its role in world politics. I hope that the positive tendencies will prevail, because we are used from history to call Turkey the sick man of Europe.

**Turkey used to be secular, but we see shifts. Is this worrying?**

The role of religion is increasing in many places, including in Turkey. The world is changing and people are in search of what could preserve their identity for the future. In addition, Turkey finds itself entangled in the knot of the Middle East problems. And Turkey needs to leverage itself vis-à-vis its Islamic environment by raising the religious flag. But I don’t thing Turkey will become a religious state, such as Iran. The Turkish society is much different, and many ethnicities are represented in Turkish society. Especially in a megapolis such as Istanbul this is impossible. Recent elections have shown that Turkey is divided at 50-50. I don’t think that the future of Turkey is the religious state.

**What about the Christian world extremists, for example the Creationists in the US who oppose Darwin?**

I don’t think it’s sustainable to question if man descended from apes, but such theories can still be used by populists to attain their goals, including opposing international efforts to mitigate climate change. But I think the scientific approach will prevail. One of the goals of the Astana meetings is to encourage religious enlightenment.

**The Serbian Orthodox Church played a very negative role during the Yugoslav wars. And in Russia the Russian Orthodox Church is becoming more and more reactionary. Do you agree?**

In the case of Russia, I think the Orthodox Church is been used to mask some internal problems of the economy and of society. Moreover, the Russian Orthodox Church is losing huge territories where it used to be influential, such as Ukraine, and fears that the process will continue with other countries. I think the Russian Orthodox Church is a manifestation of a certain imperialist mentality that exists in Russia.

**Do you feel that in Kazakhstan?**

Not really, because the Orthodox have become a minority, now 70% of our population are Kazakhs, and as you know the vast majority of Kazakhs are Muslim. Moreover, the 23% of Russians and Ukrainians in Kazakhstan are divided. And they cannot raise issues, because according to our constitution religion cannot interfere in state affairs. But the churches are there, people gather there on religious holidays. People in Kazakhstan maintain their religious identity at the ritual level. There is no fanaticism in Kazakhstan and the Kazakhs are not fanatic Muslims. The other religions feel no need to defend themselves, because they are not attacked. But I suspect that there is a sense of unease about what is happening in Russia.
Kazakhstan was praised today (10 October) as it hosted for the sixth time the Congress of the Leaders of World and Traditional Religions, which traditionally issues messages of peace, mutual respect and tolerance. A few religious leaders, however, defended their countries controversial policies.

The two-day event opened in its traditional venue, the Palace of Peace and Reconciliation, a surrealistic specially-built building in the form of a pyramid where the first such Congress was held in 2003.

These meetings are the brainchild of Kazakh President Nursultan Nazarbayev, who is leveraging the traditions of religious tolerance in Kazakhstan and trying to promote this model at the global level.

Unsurprisingly, Nazarbayev, who opened the event together with Serbian President Aleksandar Vucic, who was the highest non-ecclesiastical guest at political level, mentioned that Astana, the new capital of the country and another of his masterplans, celebrated its twentieth anniversary this year.

“The Congress of Leaders of World and Traditional Religions can be considered its hallmark, since we built Astana as a Eurasian city of the future, open to all cultures”, Nazarbayev said in his speech, which he delivered in in Russian, adding that the well-known principle of “unity in diversity” was the true philosophy of the Kazakh capital.

The president also reminded that Astana had become a place that attracts international peace-making processes and unifying initiatives.

Indeed, in recent years, Astana

Continued on Page 10
has hosted meetings on nuclear disarmament and assisting peace-making in Syria.

Religious leaders, who obviously represented religions not controversial in the countries they came from, were generous in complimenting Kazakhstan for its initiative, but several of them used the tribune to make political statements.

Perhaps the strangest statement came from Chun Yi, a dressed in yellow monk, deputy chair of the Buddhist Association of China, who spoke as if he was a business lobbyist for the ‘One belt-one road’ initiative.

According to translation, he said that ‘One belt-one road’ was an example to promote ‘Buddhism China-style’ via the traditional Silk Road route.

Kazakhstan is a strong supporter of the "One belt-one road initiative", although the country's problems with China are not to be underestimated.

The representative of the Russian Orthodox Church, Metropolitan Hilarion of Volokolamsk, chairman of the Moscow Patriarchate for external church relations, made his first controversial statement while he was introducing himself.

He said he was the representative of a church uniting millions of Orthodox Christians in many countries: “Russia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Moldova and in several other countries”. In fact, the Ukrainian Orthodox church is determined to break away from Russia’s control. Moscow, however, is using its vast influence with the Orthodox world to block any rupture, but it is facing headwinds, like in Bulgaria, whose Orthodox church sided with Kyiv.

Hilarion indirectly blamed the West for having fomenting terrorism by “destroying” Iraq and Libya, supposedly “in the name of democracy”, but which had resulted in “chaos”.

“The same could have happened in Syria, had not Russia interfered in the situation”, he said. He further argued that terrorism as the world experiences it today was a result of Western “interference in internal affairs”.

The Russian representative also called on the participants to “unite strengths for the reconstruction of Syria and Iraq”.

Hilarion’s argument that interference in a country’s internal affairs amounted to terrorism was developed further by the representative of a country with good relations with Moscow. A cleric from Iran, Ayatollah Sheikh Mohsen Araghi, appealed that this Congress, or similar gatherings, should define the concept of terrorism. In his words, terrorism comes from hegemons who want to impose their culture and economy on other countries.

Without mentioning the US by name, he said and repeated that there were some who wanted to destroy other people’s cultures and their identity. As translated, he further argued that “his region” (he didn't mention Iran a single time, possibly speaking as a Shiite leader) suffers from “economic terrorism”, namely sanctions “imposed on entire peoples, who are deprived of the most important things for everyday life”.

EURACTIV asked some of the delegates to comment on the statements of the representatives from Iran and Russia, but received polite and diplomatic answers that politics and religion sometimes interfere.

Most of the other statements were less controversial, but some were surprising. The Vatican representative, Cardinal Francesco Coccopalmerio, President Emeritus of the Pontifical Council for legislative texts, paid tribute to Kazakhstan’s secularism.

“Kazakhstan is blessed for being a secular state, rich in ethnic religious and cultural diversity, and respectful for all the components of its rich mosaic. It can be an example for those countries where tensions and conflicts exist due to ethnic or religious diversity”, the Vatican high official said.

For his part, Serbian President Vucic appealed to world religious leaders to help preserve the Serbian monasteries in Kosovo.
A message from Astana: EU, be alert, the fascists are coming

By Georgi Gotev | EURACTIV.com

Marek Halter, a Jew and Holocaust survivor, used the Congress of the Leaders of World and Traditional Religions to warn Europeans that there is a high risk that fascists campaigning on the Islamophobia ticket win big in next year’s European elections.

Although there were few Europeans at the two-day Congress in Kazakhstan, which gathered religious leaders from across the world in the capital Astana, Halter turned to the European audience, warning about the risks at the May 2019 European elections.

“We are going to European elections and the fascists are growing,” Halter said, adding that the reason for that was Islamophobia. He compared the situation with the Nazi attitude to Jews.

In recent years, Halter, a writer, has been campaigning in France against the stigmatisation of Muslims and the amalgamation of their religion to terrorism.

He made a short reference to his activities in France organising marches of Imams for Dignity. In a recent letter to French President Emmanuel Macron, he wrote that millions of Muslims living in France see themselves caricatured in public debates. Consequently, their religious identity becomes a defence, while they see the forces of order as oppressors.

Halter has also criticised Macron and his government for being afraid to set foot in the neighbourhoods where Muslims live and to talk to the people.

He said he hoped there would be a journalist in the room to send the message: “Don’t worry, you don’t have to be afraid [of Muslims],” adding that those in power “are afraid to say it”.

Halter’s life deserves a novel. He was born in 1936 in Poland. During World War II, his parents escaped the Warsaw ghetto and went to the Soviet Union,

Continued on Page 12
Continued from Page 11

either young for his 84 years, he replied: “It’s because I’m fighting. Everybody who has ideals and is ready to die for his ideas will die young.”

He said that his family escaped the Warsaw ghetto with the help of Polish Catholic friends to the Russian part of occupied Poland, from where they were sent to Moscow.

“Stalin sent us to Kazakhstan, Almaty, a total of a million refugees. My little sister died of hunger. Then they sent us to Uzbekistan, and then after the war, on Victory Day (9 May in Russia), they sent me to give flowers to Stalin in Moscow. And then we came back to Poland, but anti-Semitism was very strong. We found family in Paris so we went to Paris,” he said.

In Paris, where he arrived at the age of 14, he later became a writer and his books have sold millions of copies.

“I share my ideas with millions of people, but it’s not enough. I try to fight for peace, I organised the first contact between the Israelis and the Palestinians, between Arafat and Shimon Peres. I brought Sadat to Israel, and he was killed. I brought Rabin to Arafat, who was a good friend of mine, and Rabin was killed,” Halter said.

Asked how he had succeeded where diplomats failed, he said:

“I love people. I went to Egypt, I met [Gamal Abdel] Nasser, we changed the epoch. This was a time of ideology. All the people around Nasser were Marxists. And they understood that on the Israeli side, they had brothers too, poor people who are fighting for a better life. With Arafat it was the same. Arafat was a nationalist and when I told him I will bring him another another nationalist in my home in Paris, Shimon Peres, he came.”

More fascinating anecdotes followed:

“And Arafat said – Peres is a good guy, but to make peace I need a general. And Peres told me – go to meet with [Yitzhak] Rabin, he’s a general. And we did that. But Rabin was killed. History is always a recommencement, but it’s never the same. Because the world changed the day I brought Netanyahu – I wanted to bring Khaled Mashal But Netanyahu didn’t want to meet Mashal, he met Mahmoud Abbas.”

Mashal is a Palestinian political leader who has led the Islamic Palestinian organisation Hamas since the Israeli assassination of Abdel Aziz al-Rantisi in 2004. He stepped down as Hamas’ politburo chief at the end of his term limit in 2017.

Asked if politicians abuse what they think is their right to speak in the name of God, he said:

“This is a good question. I ask politicians to do something together. It’s not enough for them to say “I did something in the church, or I did something in the synagogue, or I did something in the mosque. Do it together. We have to condemn everybody who is ready to kill in the name of God”.

Asked about his commitment to Kazakhstan, he said that a Kazakh had saved his life. One day when he was 8 years old, he was about to die of hunger, and in the market place, an old Kazakh told him “Malchik [young boy in Russian], come and eat this lepishka [small bread], because if you don’t, you will die from hunger.

75 years later, he brought French President François Hollande to Kazakhstan. “I know all of them”, he said, speaking about the French heads of state.

He told Hollande he wanted to do something about the Kazakhs because they saved his life. “What do you have in mind”, Hollande reportedly asked.

“I want to give them a Sorbonne-Kazakhstan,” was his answer.

“So we went together to Almaty. I brought [the President of Kazakhstan] Nazarbayev, and we inaugurated four years ago Sorbonne-Kazakhstan. And

at the end of the studies, hundreds of young Kazakhs obtain a Sorbonne diploma, one of the best universities in the world”.

The Congress of the Leaders of World and Traditional Religions ended with the adoption of a final declaration, pledging support to all efforts aimed at preventing attempts to fragment society on religious, racial or ethnic grounds.

The next such Congress will take place in three years but, meanwhile, a centre has been created to ensure compliance with the decisions adopted. Seminars and other meetings will take place all over the world.

Kazakhstan’s deputy foreign minister, Yerzhan Ashikbayev, told journalists that one could not expect big changes to happen overnight and results to be valid indefinitely.

“We have to engage permanently in that dialogue”, he stressed.

Kazakh diplomats were present at the Congress but were very discrete, leaving the entire stage to the religious leaders.

Participants told EURACTIV that in its first editions, religious leaders found it very difficult to sit at the same table, and talks on adopting a common document lasted very late into the night. Nowadays religious leaders are said to have a completely different attitude and have started caring about the process they find useful.

When EURACTIV complimented Halter on looking very young for his 84 years, he replied: “It’s because I’m fighting. Everybody who has ideals and is ready to die for his ideas will die young.”

Halter on looking very young for his 84 years, he replied: “It’s because I’m fighting. Everybody who has ideals and is ready to die for his ideas will die young.”
Religious dialogue in the service of peace is a brainchild of the President of Kazakhstan, inspired by the visit of Pope John Paul II to Kazakhstan in September 2001, a Catholic priest who helped organize the visit told EURACTIV.

Tomasz Peta, the current Catholic Archbishop of the Metropolitan Archdiocese of Saint Mary in the city of Astana, and leader of the Catholic community in Kazakhstan, said that Nazarbayev had been deeply impressed by the Pope’s visit to his country in such dramatic international circumstances – the visit took place only days after the 9/11 terrorist attacks in the US, which opened new pages in modern history.

On 23-24 September 2003, Astana hosted the first Congress of Leaders of World and Traditional Religions, in a building specially built for this purpose: a pyramid called The Palace of Peace and Reconciliation. Reportedly, Nazarbayev’s initiative received the support of international politicians, such as Kofi Annan, George W. Bush, Margaret Thatcher, Jiang Zemin, Nelson Mandela, Valéry Giscard d’Estaing, Mikhail Gorbachev and others.

EURACTIV spoke with Peta in the margins of the sixth edition of the Congress, which takes place every three years in Astana. Both Peta and Pope John Paul II are of Polish origin.

The deportation of Catholics and their clergy to concentration camps in the country by Soviet leader Joseph Stalin caused a great increase in the Catholic population of Kazakhstan.

Continued on Page 14
Continued from Page 13

Some of the priests later decided to help build the church in that country.

Peta was sent by his Polish diocese to work in Kazakhstan in 1990. He later became a Kazakh national. He said many of the Catholics of Polish or German origin had since left Kazakhstan, and the Catholic population of Kazakhstan stood at less than 150,000, but that it had become more ethnically diversified.

The main event of the Pontiff’s visit was the Holy Mass which was held on 24 September morning for 50,000 Catholics in the largest square of Astana. Pilgrims had come from all over Central Asia, Russia, the Baltic states, Poland and other parts of the world. More than 450 foreign journalists came to cover the event.

Peta recalled that during his visit to Kazakhstan, The Pontiff said that Kazakhstan had the mission of being a bridge between religions, nations and continents.

Many participants to the Sixth Congress of Leaders of World and Traditional Religions held on 10-11 October praised the ethnic harmony and religious tolerance in Kazakhstan, a majority-Muslim country with strong secular traditions, citing it as an example for others to follow.

Kazakhstan’s commitment to interfaith dialogue, by bringing together spiritual leaders to contribute to establishing a culture of peace was praised by Nassir Abdulaziz Al-Nasser, High Representative of the United Nations Alliance of Civilizations, with whom EURACTIV spoke as well.

The United Nations Alliance of Civilizations is an initiative proposed by the President of the Government of Spain, José Luis Rodríguez Zapatero, at the 59th General Assembly of the United Nations in 2005. It was co-sponsored by the then Turkish Prime Minister, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan.

Al-Nasser, a Qatari diplomat, who was in Astana representing the UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres, said that today identity-based violence and conflicts were on the rise. He added that terrorism and violent extremists were manipulating religion, and that in this context the efforts of Kazakhstan to sustain peace and security deserved special recognition. He also paid tribute to Kazakhstan as a non-permanent member of the UN Security Council for 2017-2018.

“We have to stay alert to any manipulation of religion that leads to violent extremism”, he said. He added that in his UN role, he was active in promoting the #SpreadNoHate initiative, a platform engaging global media in an initiative to provide counter-narratives to hate speech.

Several symposia were organized worldwide, each one aiming at identifying the triggers of hate speech, and in the case of Europe, hate speech against migrants and refugees.

Al-Nasser also said there was much to do to promote the role of women, who continue to be marginalized in many societies.

“There cannot be inclusive and resilient societies without the participation of women”, he said.

Very few women were among the participants to the congress, and none of the official delegates was a women.