

The World Forum of Spiritual Culture, Astana, Kazakhstan, October 18-20, 2010

Patrick McCollum

There are few words that could easily describe my journey to Astana, Kazakhstan. I had the high honor of being personally invited by the President and Parliament of the country to participate in an invitation only global event, which might well be defined as one of the most significant and important things I have ever done.

The event was a global forum attended by the world's most esteemed religious leaders, major thinkers, and scientists, who came together to create a new constitution aimed at protecting humanity, our planet and its resources, and to promote the inclusion of religious and spiritual voices into the final decision making processes which affect our world.

My journey from San Francisco, California to Astana, the new capital of Kazakhstan took about 16 hours, the last 6 of which was on Astana Air lines on a chartered flight with most of my future colleagues.

Kazakhstan has a long history of acknowledging diversity even while under soviet rule and has been a leader in moving toward peace and acceptance of many cultures in more recent times. The country is best known for its hospitality which dates all the way back to the development of the Silk Road in ancient history.

Kazakhstan, while it's had its problems like many other countries in the former Soviet Block, was instrumental in decommissioning over 40% of the world's nuclear arsenal voluntarily, after the dissolution of the Soviet Union, a point I personally think is well worth noting.

Lastly, Astana itself is a totally unique place, in that the entire city which is only about 10 or 12 years old, has been planned and built as an artistic center, with a specific directive toward beauty, cultural diversity, and spirituality.

As I arrived in the city, I felt much like I was in the movie, the Wizard of OZ, and if there ever were to be an Emerald City, this is it! There are pyramids, spiraling buildings, golden towers and vast plazas and walkways filled with vibrant colors and unique configurations, and the underlying connection with spirituality is palatable. A geomancer was consulted as a part of the city's planning.

On arrival, and after meeting many of my distinguished colleagues, I was taken to the Rixos Astana Presidential Hotel and checked in. It was clear that we were to be treated as highly honored guests and that our presence was considered of the utmost importance.

The Forum itself was broken up into 3 days, with the first being a general meeting and an introduction as to how we would proceed. Formal introductions were made,

and I cannot express enough, the level of participants who were invited. I was made entirely welcome within the forum and my thoughts and contributions were weighed as seriously as all of my peers, and I was included in all aspects of the conversations and decisions.

On the second day of the forum, we met in the Kazakhstan Parliament which was a beautiful building, and it was announced that our meeting would have the historical honor of being the very first such in history to be broadcast into outer space. We were then connected to the International Space Station, where Cosmonauts used their onboard camera to show us our earth as they spoke with us, so that all of the participants would be able to see just how closely all of our countries and nature were actually connected. When viewing ourselves from such a great distance, it became acutely clear, that we are all in this together, and that we'd better find a way to work things out.

During the meeting at the Kazakhstan Parliament, I had the special honor of being one of the speakers chosen to speak at the podium, where we specifically addressed the importance of nature, the interconnectedness of all life on earth, and the importance of diverse spiritual points of view working together to stop the destruction of the earth and her resources. I have included a copy of my speech for your review.

Following that, the day was packed with lively discussions of the highest caliber both at lunch and later during dinner. One of the first of my many significant conversations was with world renowned physicist, Hans Peter Duerr, who was previously the Director of the Max Planck Institute. We became friends and will continue our relationship going forward. I also had conversations with the Patriarch of the Russian Orthodox Church, a representative from the Pope, and the world renowned Sir Dr. **Reinhart** Ruge from Mexico.

Following that, I had the unique experience of being introduced to Ayatollah Muhammad Ali Taskhiri of Iran, head of the influential Organization of Islamic **Culture** and Communication, who sat directly in front of me for 2 days.

While attending the Forum, I was invited by monks to visit the now famous "Buddha Boy" in Nepal, who has been meditating for 6 years under a tree in the Jungles without food, and I will be making that trip in early 2011 to speak with him on spiritual matters.

I also had the wonderful honor of conversing with the President of the Senate of Jordan who was there representing King Abdullah, and we will be having further conversations regarding the establishment of UN sponsored events educating on religious diversity and other important matters.

In addition, I met Imam Feisal Abdul Rauf who is the center of the 911 controversy, and Alec Brook-Krasny, Deputy of the **New York State Assembly**.

Among my other new friends and colleagues , I had the honor to add Dr. Roger Nelson of Princeton University, who is the initiator of the famous Global Consciousness Project, which has measured and quantified that human emotion and thought, creates a worldwide energy force that can be directly measured by 50 plus scientific receiving stations across the globe. Obviously, his work is of significant importance to our community as it shows conclusively that human focus and intention can have a direct effect on our world. I also met **Bawa Jain, Secretary-General** of The Millennium World Peace Summit of Religious and Spiritual Leaders that opened at the United Nations in August 2000.

The list goes on and on, with new connections that include the Manager of Projects and Communication for the World Health Organization, world spiritual leaders, and one of the world's foremost Environmental layers who will be presenting to the United States Congress shortly. As a result of my participation and contributions to the event, I have now been offered numerous further opportunities, some of which are quite significant.

In closing I would like to share personal a life changing event that occurred on the last evening of the forum. I was riding on a bus back to our meeting place and a Russian scientist sat next to me. She was a woman of about my age and as we rode together, she said something to me in Russian. I don't speak Russian and I expressed that, and so a few minutes of uncomfortable silence went by between us and then she addressed me in German. Sprechen Sie **deutsch**? Nine! I answered, knowing only a little bit of German. We both looked down, wishing we could communicate with one another, but our interpreter was on another bus. Then the bus went around a very sharp curve and we both simultaneously reached forward to the seat in front of us to keep from sliding and our hands gently fell across one another. It was a profound moment ... Just two people from across the world, facing a common problem, and responding in kind.

The woman withdrew her hand and tapped it carefully over her heart *Irena*, she said! I retrieved my hand and also tapped *my* heart in return and said, *Patrick*, and we both smiled. She then turned directly toward me with a very serious look and said: *Peace?* I nodded affirmatively and said *Peace* in return, and we both hugged with tears in our eyes. I thought back to when I was a teen, with bomb shelters in our back yards and the daily fear that we or the Russians would end the world, and I realized that at least for me and her, our greatest fear was over. Now together, using our different skills and experience, we could work as partners to save the very world we both so cherish!

It is clear that a major shift is in play worldwide regarding the importance and value of recognizing our connection to one another and with our Mother and all of her inhabitants. And I am very honored to have been able to participate in this historical event. As always, I remain in service to our community and to its values, and hope that by being on the front lines and sharing some of our insights, I might

in some small way shift the consciousness of our brothers and sisters to work together with us toward preserving what you and I consider Sacred.