



## **Representative of the Russian Orthodox Church takes part in the Conference on the Middle East in Berlin**



On 20-21 October 2017, a Conference on the situation of Christians in the Middle East took place in Berlin in the framework of the dialogue between the Evangelical Church in Germany and the Ancient Oriental Churches.

Taking part in the conference were His Holiness Patriarch Tawadros II of the Coptic Church; His Holiness Patriarch Mor Ignatius Aphrem II of the Syriac Church; His Holiness Patriarch and Catholicos of All Armenians Garegin II; His Holiness Catholicos of the East and Malankara Metropolitan Baselios Mor Thomas Paulose II; bishops and theologians from Germany and countries of the Middle East.

Hieromonk Stefan (Igumnov), secretary for inter-Christians relations of the Moscow Patriarchate's Department for External Church Relation (DECR), took part in the conference at the invitation of the German side and with the blessing of the DECR chairman, Metropolitan Hilarion of Volokolamsk.

Berlin's Bishop Markus Dröge greeted the participants on behalf of the Evangelical Church in Germany at the opening of the conference. Heads of the Ancient Oriental Churches presented reports on the dire situation of Christians in the region.

Hieromonk Stefan greeted the participants on behalf of the Russian Orthodox Church and noted that its representations at the conference was not fortuitous as its Primate was the first to draw attention to the present-day tragedy of Christians in the Middle East and began to render aid to them. His Holiness Patriarch Kirill visited Egypt, Syria and Lebanon in the beginning of the so call Arab spring. His meetings and talks with the local Christian leaders, who spoke about the ousting of Christian from the region and about their hope for Russia and the Russian Orthodox Church, have laid the foundation for the efforts taken by the Moscow Patriarchate in support of the suffering brethren. Hieromonk Stefan listed the humanitarian actions already carried out, mainly in Syria and informed the participants that the Russian Orthodox Church initiated formation of the ad hoc inter-religious working group for rendering aid to the suffering people in Syria. The group was formed last April, and since then delivered two large amounts of humanitarian aid to the country.

Representative of the Russian Orthodox Church dwelt on the address delivery and distribution of humanitarian aid under the continuing hostilities in the country. Discussed with the heads and bishops of the Churches in the Middle East on the sidelines of the conference were practical aspects of the continuation of the projects. During the talk of hieromonk Stefan with His Holiness Patriarch Mor Ignatios Aphrem II a number of agreements were reached on the coordination of cooperation between the mentioned working group and the Syriac Orthodox Church.

On October 22, hieromonk Stefan met with Bishop Heinrich Bedford-Strohm, chair of the Council of the Evangelical Church in Germany, at the Berlin cathedral church. They discussed matters pertaining to the conference due to be held in Moscow in November as a part of the official dialogue between the Russian Orthodox Church and the Evangelical Church in Germany.

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