Presentation by the DECR chairman Metropolitan Hilarion of Volokolamsk at the World Summit in Defense of Persecuted Christians

800 participants from over 135 countries have gathered at the Summit that is taking place in Washington on May 10-13, 2017.

Your Holinesses, Beatitudes, Eminences, Excellencies and Graces,

esteemed fathers, brothers and sisters,

On behalf of the Russian Orthodox Church, I would like to greet you all at the session of the World Summit in Defense of Persecuted Christians.

First of all, I would like to thank the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association for organizing such a large-scale forum that has set itself the task of bringing the world community's attention to the terrible tragedy of the persecution of Christians throughout the modern world.

The two-thousand year history of the persecution of Christians

The persecution of Christians is not something new to us. “Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake,” our Lord Jesus Christ said (Mt 5:11). The leitmotif of persecution runs through all of his preaching and through all of his exhortations to the apostles. Let us recall what he said to the Twelve Apostles after he had chosen them and sent them out to preach: “Behold, I send you forth as sheep in the midst of wolves: be you therefore wise as serpents, and harmless as doves. But beware of men: for they will deliver you up to the councils, and they will scourge you in their synagogues; And you will be brought before governors and kings for my sake, for a testimony against them and the Gentiles ... And the brother will deliver up the brother to death, and the father the child: and the children will rise up against their parents, and cause them to be put to death. And you will be hated by all men for my name's sake: but he that endures to the end will be saved” (Mt 10:16-22).

In addressing these words to his disciples, the Saviour emphasizes that the Christian mission bears within its origin the nature of conflict, and that this mission will be accomplished in spite of the established laws in both the Jewish and Gentile worlds, that it will evoke irritation, non-acceptance and

aggression, and that it will be the cause of family division. Jesus acts not at all in the way in that a conventional Jewish rabbi of his time would act, who most likely would have promised his disciples various good things, would have predicted success and would have taught them how to achieve it. Jesus says nothing at all like this. He does not promise to his disciples either success, or happiness in their personal lives, or material well-being, or peace of mind. He does not promise them either recognition by the Jews, or by the Gentiles, or even by their closest family members.

The scarlet thread of the subject of persecution runs through the apostles' letters. St. Peter says: “Beloved, think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened unto you: But rejoice, inasmuch as ye are partakers of Christ's sufferings; that, when his glory shall be revealed, ye may be glad also with exceeding joy. If ye be reproached for the name of Christ, happy are ye; for the spirit of glory and of God rests upon you: on their part he is evil spoken of, but on your part he is glorified. But let none of you suffer as a murderer, or as a thief, or as an evildoer, or as a busybody in other men's matters. Yet if any man suffers as a Christian, let him not be ashamed; but let him glorify God on this behalf” (1 Pet 4:12-16).

It is important to note that Peter, when speaking of persecution, uses the word “Christian,” which is encountered throughout the whole body of the New Testament only twice (Acts 11:26 and Acts 26:28). Not all persecution is for salvation, the apostle emphasizes, but only that which is “for the name of Christ,” and not everyone who is reproached is blessed, but only he who is reproached as a Christian. As “strangers and pilgrims” (1 Pet 2:11), Christians find themselves to be in inward opposition to this world and its vices, in spite of the fact that they are loyal to the civil authorities on all levels, from the emperor down to governors (1 Pet 2:14-17).

We cannot but recall the words, too, of the apostle Paul. His words from the Epistle to the Romans today resound as an exhortation and support to all suffering Christians: “Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword?

As it is written, For thy sake we are killed all the day long; we are accounted as sheep for the slaughter. Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him that loved us. For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Rom 8:35-39).

The great apostle, who himself underwent a severe school of persecution and privations, in these words calls the Christians of Rome to love and uncompromising fidelity to Christ, making it clear what for they must endure tribulation, distress, persecution, hunger, nakedness, peril and the sword: not for a future reward in heaven, but from love of Christ. It is love which is to be the impelling force which helps them

overcome all trials.

The Church was universally persecuted throughout the first three centuries of her existence. In the fourth century, a period of prosperity came along for Christians in the Roman empire, but in the Persian empire the persecution of Christians continued right up until the sixth century. Throughout the following centuries Christians were subjected to a great variety of persecution from the Arabs, Turks, Mongols and various representatives of other peoples who were adherents of Islam. There has almost never been in the history of Christianity a century when they were not persecuted – if not in one region of the world, then in another.

The twentieth century has highlighted with particular poignancy the price Christians have had to pay for their faith. Numerous revolutions shook many countries of Europe, Asia and Latin America, provoking a powerful wave of violence against Christians.

In Turkey, the mass destruction of Armenians, Assyrians and other Christian peoples heralded the beginning of the twentieth century. The government of the Young Turks that had come to power initiated a genocide against the Christian population of the Ottoman empire, which continued after its fall. More than a million people were affected by the brutal executions, massacres and mass deportations.

This year Russia and other countries of the “post-Soviet expanse” recall the hundredth anniversary of the 1917 Revolution, which opened an era of cruel persecution of the Russian Orthodox Church. In the persons of Lenin and Stalin, the authorities initiated repression unprecedented on its scale against their own people. Tens of millions were its victims. The Church was subjected to almost total destruction: bishops and priests were shot without trial or due process, churches were blown up, monasteries and theological schools were closed. Tens of thousands of Christians became martyrs and confessors in glorifying Christ by their deaths. The Church gave to the world a great multitude of saints who, as the apostle says, “were tortured, not accepting deliverance; that they might obtain a better resurrection: And others had trial of cruel mockings and scourgings, yea, moreover of bonds and imprisonment” (Heb 11:35-36).

“In our troubled times the Lord has revealed a host of new sufferers,” wrote St. Patriarch Tikhon of Moscow in 1918. “If the Lord sends us the trials of persecution, bonds, torments and even death, then we will endure all of this with patience, believing that nothing happens to us if it is not the will of God and that our spiritual exploit will not remain without fruit in the same way as the sufferings of the Christian martyrs conquered the world for Christ's teaching.”

The feat of the martyrs is the common legacy of Christians of all denominations. In the years of persecution directed against the Church, both Orthodox and Catholics and Protestants were all

subjected to persecution in the USSR. It was not unusual for representatives of various denominations to find themselves in the same prison cell. At that time the inter-confessional barriers disappeared, the inter-religious boundaries ceased to exist. What united Orthodox and Catholics in those years was far more important than that which divided them, for they were united by love of Christ.

In the twentieth century, the new martyrs and confessors of the Church of Russia were condemned to death not for any particular personal qualities or acts, not for any particular misjudged actions or transgressions: they were deliberately and systematically annihilated solely because they believed in Jesus Christ as God and Saviour. Christian churches were blown up for no other reason than they were Christian. Icons were burnt on bonfires because the face of Christ was depicted on them.

In Nazi Germany and the Second Spanish Republic in the 1930s, Christians of all denominations were subjected to persecution on a varying scale. The persecution of the Catholic Church in Mexico in the 1920s was particularly brutal and bloody: had it not been for Graham Greene's novel *The Power and the Glory*, few people would have known about it. In the mid-twentieth century the Cultural Revolution in China was accompanied by the mass repression of Christian clergy. The sad list of countries where Christians were subjected to persecution throughout the twentieth century could go on almost indefinitely.

Persecuted Christians once more discovered for themselves the power and relevance of the words Jesus once addressed to his disciples and through them to all subsequent generations of his followers for all time: that they will be persecuted, killed and tortured for his name. The destiny of millions of Christians in the twentieth century replicated the situation in which the Christian community found itself in the first three centuries of its existence. Once more each Christian was confronted by the choice between fidelity to Christ and renouncing his faith, compromising his conscience or serving mammon.

The persecution of Christians in the twenty-first century

The twenty-first century ushered in a new vast wave of persecution of Christians in various regions of the world. This persecution has been particularly severe in those countries where the dominant religion is Islam. And yet, the persecutors are not those moderate Muslims, who want to live in peace and harmony with their neighbours who practice other religions, but extremists and terrorists hiding behind Islamic slogans and Islamic rhetoric. “The time is coming that whoever kills you will think that he offers God service. And these things will they do to you, because they have not known the Father nor me,” says Christ (Jn 16:2-3). In committing crimes and murdering Christians, the terrorists claim that they are acting in the name of Allah. However, Muslim leaders throughout the world have distanced themselves from these criminal acts with a sense of revulsion.

Christians today suffer most of all in the countries of the Middle East and Africa. Christians have lived in these areas for almost two thousand years. Today they have found themselves in the pathway of the political or economic interests of those forces which are not afraid to use terrorists in pursuit of their goals, pretending that they are fighters for freedom and democracy. The scale of the persecution of Christians, meanwhile, is willfully passed over in silence by the mass media and by the international community.

Let me give you a few examples.

Up until 2003 in Iraq there lived one and a half million Christians belonging to various Churches. There were about three hundred church buildings within the country. The large Christian communities were concentrated in the big cities – Baghdad, Mosul, Basra and Kirkuk. Before war broke out there, Kurdistan was a place where Christians lived in tight-knit communities. However, after the beginning of the so-called Arab Spring, the majority of Christians have been forced to abandon the country, and at present their number has been variously estimated at between 150 and 250 thousand. The mass exodus of Christians from Iraq continues.

In Libya, the same Arab Spring has led to the almost complete disappearance of Christians. The current leadership has openly declared its indifference as to whether Christians remain there.

In Egypt, after the so-called Muslim Brotherhood came to power, the killing of Christians and the burning down of churches has acquired a systematic nature. Christians have begun to abandon the country. After Abdul Fattah el-Sisi's government came to power, the situation has changed for the better, but to this day explosions occur in Egypt's Christian churches and dozens of people have become the victims of terrorist bombs.

In each of the aforementioned countries, events developed according to the same scenario. At first, the regimes were accused of human rights violations, the leaders of these states were declared to be dictators, and then the regimes were overthrown with the help of external forces – supposedly in the name of democracy and human rights. But can we say that in Iraq after the overthrow of Saddam Hussein or in Libya after the killing of Gaddafi peace and democracy have established themselves? No. On the contrary, political chaos has allowed various base terrorist forces to raise their heads in these countries. For Christians, then, the overthrow of these regimes has turned into mass persecution, as a result of which no place has been left for them in their own countries.

The same situation would have occurred in Syria if the existing political regime had been overthrown. In those places in Syria which have ended up in terrorist hands during the course of the war, Christians have been mercilessly destroyed. And the world would hardly know anything of this tragedy if terrorists

themselves had not posted on the internet dreadful scenes of vengeance against Christians who have been publicly beheaded and crucified, and whose families and villages have been butchered. Those who have remained alive have been subjected to torture and various forms of humiliation.

We share the position of their Holinesses Patriarch John X of the Orthodox Church of Antioch and Aphrem II of the Syrian Orthodox Church, expressed in their recent joint message marking the anniversary of abduction of the two hierarchs – Metropolitans of Aleppo, Paul and Yohanna Ibrahim. The message states that the Christians of the East want to stay in the land of their ancestors, that the talks of “the civilized world” about democracy must not divert people’s attention away from the pressing needs of the Syrian population and from the necessity to put an end to the war in the country, that the financing of terrorist groups should be stopped at once, and that instead bread must be given to those starving. Brothers and sisters, we ought to hear this voice and convey this message to those in power, for it expresses the actual opinion of Christians in Syria.

The genocide of Christians is taking place before the very eyes of the civilized world community. Until recently, both politicians and the mass media in the west with one accord remained silent about this. Today this “conspiracy of silence” has been broken, and people have begun to speak about the persecution of Christians at the highest international arenas. But even now many of those who try to speak out on this topic are rebuke: “Don't speak about Christians, let us speak about minorities instead.” And they attempt to pass the problem over in silence and redirect the subject matter towards a politically correct discussion on tolerance to various minorities, sexual and otherwise.

We know little of the genocide that has unfurled against Christians in Africa. And yet, in Nigeria and the neighbouring countries terrorists from Boko Haram and nomadic tribes have killed whole villages of Christians. In Nigeria alone extremists recently destroyed nine hundred churches. The authorities in Northern Sudan have dropped bombs on Christians and have subjected them to constant discrimination. Attacks on Christians have taken place in Somalia and Tanzania.

Our brothers and sisters in Asia, in countries such as Afghanistan, Pakistan, Indonesia, India and Myanmar, have had to endure all sorts of suffering and persecution. In Pakistan, any Muslim can slander a Christian with impunity and demand the death penalty for him. The trial continues of Asia Bibi, a Christian woman and mother of a large family, sentenced to death supposedly for insulting the religious feelings of Muslims. In Indonesia, the election of a Christian to the post of city mayor has brought about protests. Attacks by heathens upon Christians have not abated in some of India's provinces. In Myanmar, government troops have destroyed more than sixty Christian churches in just over a few years.

The contribution of the Russian Orthodox Church

The Russian Orthodox Church was one of the first to speak openly of the persecution of Christians when everybody else remained silent about it. The Moscow Patriarchate from the very beginning of the events of the so-called Arab Spring has expressed serious concern over the situation of the Christian population in the Middle East and Africa.

On 30th May 2011 the Holy Synod of the Russian Orthodox Church released a special statement, part of which I quote: “Unfortunately, manifestations of Christianophobia can no longer be interpreted as separate incidents: in some regions of the world they are becoming an established tendency … The overcoming of discrimination on the grounds of religion is possible only by holding a broad dialogue with governments, international organizations, religious communities and representatives of civil society. We call upon the world community, religious leaders and all responsible public forces to develop an all-encompassing and effective mechanism for the defence of Christians and Christian communities who are subjected to persecution or curtailments in their religious life and activities … We express solidarity with our brothers and sisters – Christians who suffer discrimination, persecution and violence, sharing with them their sufferings and privations, no matter where they journey on earth. We pray for and call upon the faithful children of the Church to strengthen their prayers for the suffering and persecuted brothers and sisters, for the strengthening of their faith and spiritual courage.”

His Holiness Patriarch Kirill of Moscow and All Russia visited Syria and Lebanon from 12th to 15th November 2011. His visit had the goal of, *inter alia*, supporting the fraternal Christian Churches in the burgeoning conflict.

On 30th November 2011 the Moscow Patriarchate held in the Russian capital an international forum under the title of “Freedom of Conscience: The Problem of the Discrimination and Persecution of Christians”. The conference brought together religious leaders and experts from many countries.

In subsequent years the Russian Orthodox Church has exerted and continues to exert varied efforts to defend the rights of Christians subjected to persecution. I will not list them in detail: I will speak only briefly of the basic directions which our work has taken us.

Everywhere and at all times we have set ourselves the goal of raising our voice in defence of Christ's followers. We regularly raise the topic of the persecution and discrimination of Christians at international organizations. Representatives of the Moscow Patriarchate have repeatedly spoken out in defence of the rights of Christians at the United Nations and the UN Human Rights Council. We have spoken of the wretched situation of Christians at the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe, the European Parliament and other institutions. In 2015 at the UN Human Rights Council, many countries adopted a statement in support of persecuted Christians in the Middle East. The head of the European

Parliament at almost the same time spoke out in support of those persecuted.

We are constantly raising the subject of the fight against terrorism and the defence of Christians in dialogue with political leaders and the diplomatic corps of foreign countries. We are calling for the setting up of a single global anti-terrorist coalition which would bring together the political and religious leaders of all the civilized world. It is only this type of coalition that could deliver a decisive and final blow to terrorism, once and for all putting an end to this plague of the twenty-first century. In order to set up this coalition, political differences have to be set aside and short-term political agendas have to be abandoned. Terrorism is the common challenge for the whole world, and it has to be met unanimously. While various forces and coalitions are fighting terrorism, at times clashing with one another, we will be unable to defeat it. We tirelessly remind political leaders of various countries of this fact.

Not a single meeting of His Holiness the Patriarch of Moscow and All Russia and the chairman of the Department for External Church Relations of the Moscow Patriarchate with foreign politicians practically goes by without discussing the situation of the Christian communities of the Middle East and Africa.

The leadership and representatives of the Russian Orthodox Church take an active part in international and inter-religious forums dedicated to the situation in the Middle East. Such events have taken place at various times in Jordan, Morocco, Lebanon, Italy, Greece and other countries.

Inter-Christian dialogue has played an important role in rendering aid to persecuted Christians. On 12th February 2016 in Havana the historic meeting between His Holiness Patriarch Kirill of Moscow and All Russia and Pope Francis took place. The primates of the two largest Christian Churches testified to the understanding on both sides that the situation in the world requires urgent and – as the Joint Declaration in Havana states – coordinated action. A central place at both the meeting and in the Declaration was allocated to the tragedy of the genocide of Christians in the Middle East and the countries of North and Central Africa. From the lips of the Pope and the Patriarch of Moscow and All Russia there resounded the call for agreed action by forces combating terrorism so that political leaders could overcome their differences and unite in the fight against this common threat. This powerful appeal, which emerged from the depths of believing hearts, could not but be heard: immediately after the meeting, representatives of Russia and the USA agreed at negotiations in Munich upon a cease-fire in Syria, and both the Syrian government and the opposition gave their assent to the agreement. The joint peace-making efforts of the two Churches – the Roman Catholic Church and the Russian Orthodox Church – are being realized on a regular basis.

A concrete step in developing inter-Church action in supporting the Christian population in the Middle East was the visit of representatives of the Russian Orthodox and Roman Catholic Churches to Lebanon and Syria on the 6th and 7th of April 2016. The consultations held during the visit with the local

Christian denominations ought to serve as a basis for developing further joint projects aimed at supporting brothers and sisters who have suffered affliction. A number of important tasks were highlighted which require a solution in order to achieve the desired aim of preserving the Christian presence in the region. Among these tasks were the restoration of churches and monasteries, which traditionally have been centres for consolidating the Christian communities, the guarantee of work (particularly for the young), and the restoration of Syria's traditional economic infrastructure. In all these matters the Syrians are expecting from the world community the full-scale assistance as soon as the war in their country comes to an end.

The Russian Orthodox Church played an active part in preparing and holding the V European Orthodox-Catholic Forum, which took place in Paris from 9th to 12th January 2017. The main topic of the forum was resistance to the terrorist threat. Speaking at the forum with a presentation on the violation of religious rights and freedoms, I especially emphasized that “today, as never before, a consolidated witness of the Churches is important to the world around us to the need to adopt urgent measures aimed at protecting the Christian population in the Middle East. The global system of political and international relations is now undergoing serious changes, and therefore we have a chance to bolster within it the protection of the rights and interests of Christians in the Middle East and North Africa.” In its final document the Forum spoke of the need for close interaction between Orthodox and Catholics when confronted by the unforeseen challenges which the contemporary world is experiencing, expressed solidarity with suffering Christians of the Middle East, Africa and Asia, and condemned all forms of discrimination on religious grounds.

Our Church has defended the rights of persecuted Christians within the context of inter-religious dialogue. We have expressed concern at the situation in contacts with the Organization of Islamic Cooperation, which officially spoke out against the persecution of Christians in 2014. We made our interlocutors aware of our position in the Islamic Culture and Relations Organization in Iran and the Presidency of Religious Affairs in Turkey. I had the opportunity to visit the leading Islamic Al-Azhar University in Egypt and meet with its leadership and speak before its teachers and students. We have raised the issue of the persecution of Christians before the Islamic leaders of Syria, Iraq, Yemen and other countries. It is being discussed, too, within the framework of dialogue with political leaders of Muslim countries. The problem of persecution of Christians is constantly part of the agenda for our dialogue with Jewish leaders and organizations.

As practice has shown, inter-religious dialogue can be an effective instrument for the defence of our persecuted brothers and sisters. In 2014, the secretary general of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation Iyad Bin Amin Madani expressed his support for Christians of the Middle East. We heard encouraging words from the Supreme imam of Al-Azhar Ahmed el-Tayeb and the head of the Presidency of Religious Affairs in Turkey Mehmet Görmez. The king and representatives of the Royal

House of Jordan have spoken out in defence of persecuted Christians. In Morocco in 2016 a Muslim conference took place devoted to seeking the ways to defend the status of religious minorities in Islamic countries. The president of the World Jewish Congress Ronald Lauder has often spoken out in support of the persecuted. The leaders of Russia's traditional religions have repeatedly condemned in the public sphere the persecution of Christians.

In 2012, at a meeting of Vladimir Putin (then one of the candidates to be president of the Russian Federation) with leaders of the traditional religious communities of our country I expressed the wish that one of the directions that Russian foreign policy would take would be the systematic defence of Christians living in those lands where they are now subjected to persecution. And today we speak of how the leadership of Russia has done a huge amount of work in drawing the world community's attention to the fate of persecuted Christians. The Department for External Church Relations maintains a good working relationship in this regard with the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

Both Russia and the Russian Orthodox Church participate in wide-scale projects for rendering humanitarian and material aid to the Christians in the Middle East. In 2013, our Church collected 1.3 million dollars, which was sent for the needs of the Orthodox community in Syria. In 2016, five tons of medicines and medical equipment was sent to the Patriarchal Al-Hosn Hospital in Syria. The Russian Orthodox Church participates in the collection and distribution of humanitarian aid in cooperation with the Russian Ministry for Emergency Situations and a whole number of public organizations. Fourteen planes of humanitarian aid have been sent to Syria since 2013.

In March of 2017, we set up a working group with the participation of representatives of all of Russia's traditional religions for the coordination of the work in rendering aid to the suffering population of Syria and the organization of joint projects in this direction. It ought to be stated that Russian Muslims take a most active part in this work.

The curtailment of the rights of Christians in traditional Christian Countries

The manifestations of aggression in relation to Christians in the modern world has acquired the forms not only of physical violence, but also the curtailment of peoples' right to a public expression of their faith, to following their values and openly wearing religious symbols. It is with sadness and concern that we observe the growing process of the dechristianization of the public sphere of the Old and New worlds, which historically have always been important strongholds of Christian civilization. Churches and communities are consigned to being relics of the past and not an equal participant in social processes.

Certain things happening in society which are more and more often recognized as the norm and even

encouraged contradict the gospel commandments. We are seriously alarmed by the striving of a number of countries to allow the practice of euthanasia. In some countries (the Netherlands, Belgium, Canada, Luxemburg), the patient is legally permitted to die voluntarily. Recently in Italy the discussion of the possibility of euthanasia created much noise. In many European countries and America, the ideology aimed at supporting sexual minorities and the propaganda of the homosexual way of life is actively imposed, often with the help of the media and the educational system.

The Russian Orthodox Church defends the sanctity of human life from the moment of conception up until natural death, and confesses the gospel ideals of marriage and the family. The principled position of the Church is that society ought to preserve traditional values and learn how to balance human rights and freedom, on the one hand, with responsibility for the moral well-being of the human person on the other. It is sad that guaranteeing human rights becomes more often a synonym for permissiveness and moral decay. This tendency is a blind alley of social development.

What can we do together?

What does today's situation tell us Christians? First of all, that we should not remain inactive in relation to the sufferings of our persecuted brothers and sisters, since, as St. Paul says, “whether one member suffers, all the members suffer with it; or one member be honoured, all the members rejoice with it. Now ye are the body of Christ, and members in particular” (1 Cor 12:26-27). Today, as never before, Christians are required to express solidarity in interceding for the suffering and persecuted, who glorify Christ with their heroism. By empathizing with them in these sufferings, in helping the persecuted, we must manifest our unity to the world.

We are called upon to unite in order to interact on a practical level by helping our suffering brothers and sisters, by vindicating their right to live in accordance with their religion and conscience. This inter-Christian solidarity ought to be more important for us on the practical level than the differences between the Christian denominations which have amassed over the centuries. These differences will still continue to divide us, but they should not be an obstacle towards joint action in defence of persecuted Christians, no matter what denomination they belong to.

Today, terrorists and extremists proclaim Islamic slogans, but they are not ministers of Allah, but servants of Satan. Let us speak about this openly and challenge Islamic leaders throughout the world to condemn terrorism as something that contradicts the teaching of the Koran, openly curse those who commit terrorist acts supposedly in the name of Allah. May this clear and precise condemnation resound from the lips of religious and political leaders of Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Iraq, Iran, Turkey and other countries where Islam is *de jure* or *de facto* the state religion. Terrorists ought to be pariahs in the Islamic world.

The interaction of religious bodies has today acquired a special meaning. Terrorism is the common challenge to both Christians and Muslims and representatives of other religious traditions. It is essential that everybody understands this clearly. The terrorist's bomb makes no distinction in whom it blows apart: its victims are people independent of their religious allegiance. And if today terrorists select as their target mainly Christians, then this does not mean that tomorrow they will not start to destroy Muslims who do not share their satanic ideology. There are already examples of such cases of indiscriminate attacks.

At the same time, we can produce many examples of the construction of a peaceful and harmonious society. Christians and Muslims live side by side in peace with each other in Lebanon and Jordan. Egypt has embarked upon the path of inter-religious dialogue and the uprooting of terrorism. Russia has amassed over many centuries experience of inter-religious cooperation and interaction whereby Christians, Muslims, Jews and Buddhists not only do not have conflicts with one another, but also come together in the Interreligious Council of Russia in order to solve relevant problems and adopt a common position for the defence of spiritual and moral values.

Today the role of a high-quality religious education is substantially growing. The terrorists' success is not least of all explained by the fact that in many countries of the world the level of literacy in religious issues is extremely low. People join the terrorists because they do not know the truth about Islam or Christianity. The ideologues of terror are able to convince their followers that Christians are the agents of foreign colonizers and the enemies of Islam, and there is no other way of defending Islam than solely through the annihilation of Christians. And feeble souls fall under the influence of this ideology.

We can do many things together. The attention of the world is now focused on our summit. The united voice of the Christian confessions must bear witness to our solidarity with our persecuted brothers and sisters, and call upon the world community to intensify its efforts in combating extremism, terrorism and Christianophobia.

Let us pray to our Lord Jesus Christ who rose from the dead to strengthen those who believe in him, so that the words of the apostle Paul may come true in our time: “We are troubled on every side, yet not distressed; we are perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; cast down, but not destroyed; always bearing about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus, that the life also of Jesus might be made manifest in our body. For we which live are always delivered unto death for Jesus' sake, that the life also of Jesus might be made manifest in our mortal flesh” (2 Cor 4:8-11).

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