Metropolitan Hilarion of Volokolamsk meets with Yazidi leaders



On 10 November 2015, Metropolitan Hilarion of Volokolamsk, chairman of the Department for External Church Relations of the Moscow Patriarchate, met with the Yazidi community leaders. The meeting took place at the DECR premises.

The Yazidi delegation included Hazem Tahsin Saeed, acting Mir of the Yazidi community; Baba Sheikh, spiritual leader of the Yazidi community; Abdulkareem Sulaiman Hal, head of the Mir's Executive Office; Khairi Elias Ali, Deputy Minister for Yazidi Affairs of the Government of the Iraqi Kurdistan; Yuri Nabiyev, president of the Society for Solidarity and Cooperation with the Kurdish people; and other representatives of the Yazidi community. Among those who took part in the meeting were also Rev. Dimitry Safonov, head of the DECR Sector for Interreligious Contacts; Mr. Leonid Sevastyanov, executive director of St Gregory the Theologian Foundation; and Mr. Ilya Kashitsin, a DECR staff member.

The DECR chairman greeted the guests and told them about the external activities of the Russian Orthodox Church. According to Metropolitan Hilarion, the dialogue with non-Christian communities, aimed at responding to the challenges of today's world, is an important part of the DECR's work. In Russia, there were no interreligious wars and traditional religious communities live in peace with each other, Metropolitan Hilarion noted.

The archpastor outlined what efforts the Moscow Patriarchate makes to protect the rights of Christians and other religious communities in the Middle East. "We are deeply concerned over the situation in the Middle East. We see that religious minorities there are subjected to persecutions and genocide by terrorists acting under the cloak of religion," the DECR chairman said. As he noted, the Russian Orthodox Church was the first to speak openly about the persecutions of religious minorities, caused by the spread of extremism as a result of the irresponsible external interference in the affairs of the Middle Eastern states.

As Metropolitan Hilarion mentioned, he visited the Middle East at various times and saw that religious communities there had lived in peace and accord until the so called 'Arab Spring' began. He emphasized that state authorities played an important part, for terrorist groups began to commit their unlawful acts in the countries, in which the state power got weakened or the current regime was overthrown as a result of external intervention.

Hazem Tahsin Saeed told those in attendance about the tragedy of the Yazidis, who are subjected to persecutions by extremists in Iraq. Almost five hundred thousand Yazidis in Iraq were forced to leave their homes and are still living in the mountains in tent camps.

The representatives of the Yazidi community noted a high level of relationships between Yazidis and Christians in Iraq. Some of those who took part in the meeting had been eyewitnesses of the IS militants' seizing the Yazidi villages in Sinjar, Iraq. As they told, the extremists had been merciless, killing civilians, including old people, taking women and children captive, committing violence, using people as human shields, and forcing them to become suicide attackers. Those who fled into the Sinjar mountains, were trapped there by the militants and died of starvation and dehydration.

To conclude the meeting, Metropolitan Hilarion called upon the Yazidi leaders to bear witness before the world community to the genocide which is going on in the Middle East today. The participants in the meeting expressed their willingness to promote cooperation in defending the rights of the religious communities, subjected to persecutions.

DECR Communication Service

Source: https://mospat.ru/en/news/50011/