



## **DECR representative attends 3d Christian Youth Forum in Russia**

June 2 – 5, 2015, the 3d Christian Youth Forum in Russia took place in Sochi, Krasnodar Region. Among its themes was the serious situation of Christians in the Middle East and North Africa. The forum was attended by over 200 people, among them members of Russian and foreign youth organizations and public and political movements, as well as scientists and representatives of the Greek, Georgian and Armenian communities in Russia. With the blessing of the head of the Moscow Patriarchate department for external church relations (DECR), Metropolitan Hilarion of Volokolamsk, the event was attended by Ilya Kashitsyn of the DECR interreligious contacts section.

Before the opening of the forum, a thanksgiving was celebrated at the church of St Vladimir Equal-to-the-Apostles in Sochi. The rector of the church, Archpriest Andrey Dubrovsky, read out a message of greeting from Metropolitan Isidore of Yekaterinodar and Kuban.

On June 3, the forum worked in a plenary session. It was devoted to the situation of Christians in the Middle East. Ilya Kashitsyn, in his address, pointed to the fact that the persecution against Christians in the Middle East by the so-called 'Islamic State' can be described as genocide. He pointed to the need for Christian communities to unite their efforts in defending the suffering Christian population in the Middle East. In his opinion, these efforts can be promoted in particular by the memory of the Christian genocide in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. The centenary of those tragic events was marked by memorial events which took place in 2015 throughout the world.

On the same day, participants, among them representatives of Christian communities in Lebanon, worked in the section on International Relations. They discussed possible ways of giving help to Middle East Christians. They noted the results of the efforts made by the Russian State, the Russian Orthodox Church and the Imperial Orthodox Palestine Society to support the Christian population in the Middle East and North Africa. In connection with the serious situation in neighbouring Syria, participants from Lebanon shared their fears of the extremists' invasion in their country.

During the section work on June 3 and 4, there was a discussion on such issues as ways of overcoming conflicts, various aspects of social service and work with the mass media. In the evening of June 4, the forum was closed in a solemn ceremony.

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