Seminar on “Christians of the East: Is There a Hope for the Future?” takes place in Brussels

On 2 December 2014, a seminar on “Christians of the East: Is There a Hope for the Future?” organized by the Thomas More Institute took place at the *Château Sainte-Anne* Royal International Club in Brussels, Belgium.

As the Representation of the Russian Orthodox Church at the European international institutions reports, among the speakers were Mr. *Benjamin Blanchard,* founder of the “SOS. Christians of the East” Charity Foundation; Ms. Roueida Khouri, President of the “Christians of Syria for Peace” Association; and Prof. *Jean-François* Colosimo from St Sergius Orthodox Theological Institute in Paris, who presented his new book on the future of Christians in the Middle East.

The speakers pointed out that every year 150-200 million Christians all over the world were subjected to persecution and discrimination for their faith and that the most tragic was the situation of Christian population in Iraq and Syria.

“Governments of the Western countries deceive their citizens; they have kept silence about the calvary of Christians in Syria,” Ms. Khouri said in her address, “The West has entered a war, expecting that the regimes undesirable for it will fall one after another, in domino principle, as the result of the so-called “Arab Spring.” The seizure of power by the Islamists has only led to the disintegration of states and the worsening of situation of not only Christians, but also of the undesirable traditional branches of Islam. In Homs, where some sixty thousand Christians lived before the crisis, just twenty-eight people are living now. For two and a half years in Ar-Raqqah and Yabroud Christian families have been forced to pay ransom of one thousand and six hundred Syrian pounds or about thirty-five grams of gold per month for their life and for the opportunity to remain Christians. Churches and monasteries have been burnt down, shrines have been desecrated, and all symbols of Christian religion have been banned. In these circumstances the question arises if there is a future for Christians in Syria. The Middle East is the cradle of Christianity, the home for Christians. We must stay in our homeland. Help us stay in our land. There is still a future for us in the land where our ancestors have lived together, in peace and accord with their Muslim brothers, for fourteen centuries. Peace can be restored in Syria. Syria asks the West neither for money nor for weapons. Syria asks for peace.”

During the discussion archpriest Dimitry Sizonenko, acting representative of the Russian Orthodox Church at the European international institutions, said that the Russian people felt solidarity towards the Syrian people who are undergoing such a hard period in their history. He told about the aid that the

Imperial Orthodox Palestine Society rendered to people living in the war-torn Syria, as well as about the initiatives of the Moscow Patriarchate, aimed at overcoming the crisis and upholding Christian presence in the Middle East.

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