



**THE RUSSIAN ORTHODOX CHURCH**

Department for External Church Relations

## **Greetings of Metropolitan Hilarion of Volokolamsk to the participants in the IX Assembly of the World Conference of Religions for Peace**

*Greetings of Metropolitan Hilarion of Volokolamsk, Chairman of the Moscow Patriarchate's Department for External Church Relations, to the participants in the IX Assembly of the World Conference of Religions for Peace (Vienna, Austria, November 20-22, 2013):*

Dear participants in the Assembly!

I wholeheartedly greet you all who have gathered in the capital of Austria to discuss the state and prospects of the development of inter-religious cooperation. During the years of its activities, the World Conference of Religions for Peace has become an authoritative discussion forum that unites religious leaders from many countries.

The theme of the IX World Assembly, 'Welcoming the Other: Action for Human Dignity, Citizenship and Shared Well-being,' is very topical today as we see the gross flouting of human dignity and violation of basic human rights in the world. In the first place, this concerns the situation in Syria, where a murderous civil war has been going on for several years being dramatized by intervention of international terrorist groups. Being driven by religious hatred, the extremists commit mass murders of Christians and acts of arson against churches in Syria. Harmless people, including women and children, are ousted from their homes and exposed to violence. Many Muslims also suffer from the actions of the fundamentalists. Our duty today is to do anything possible to put an end to the conflict.

Metropolitan Gregorios Yohanna Ibrahim of Aleppo from the Syriac Orthodox Church has been known to the WCRP during many years of his work. He was abducted by the extremists in Syria on April 22, 2013, together with Metropolitan Paul Yazigi of the Orthodox Church of Antioch. Their whereabouts and fate remain unknown. I call upon the Assembly to issue a special appeal to the world community to facilitate their release as soon as possible.

The problem of persecution and discrimination against Christians in other regions of the world is no less acute. Every year, about one hundred thousand Christians die by violence for their faith because of

interreligious conflicts. It is necessary to acknowledge the fact that Christians are the most persecuted religious community on our planet. About one hundred million Christians are persecuted in the world at present. According to the Commission of the Episcopal Conference of the European Union, 75% of all persecutions on religious grounds occur against Christians.

I am confident that the use of all available opportunities for opposing religious extremism could considerably better the lot of those persecuted and discriminated on religious grounds.

I wish the participants in the Assembly successful work on the course of peacemaking, interreligious dialogue, and cooperation.

**/+ Hilarion/**

**Metropolitan of Volokolamsk**

**Chairman**

**Department for External Church Relations**

**Moscow Patriarchate**

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