



## **DECR chairman tells the students of Moscow theological schools about the current situation of Chinese Autonomous Orthodox Church**

On 21 February 2012, Metropolitan Hilarion of Volokolamsk, chairman of the Moscow Patriarchate's Department for External Church Relations, delivered a lecture on 'An Era of New Martyrdom. Discrimination of Christians in Various Parts of the World' to the faculty and students of the Moscow theological schools. Answering the questions after the lecture, the DECR chairman touched upon the issues of pastoral care for the Orthodox compatriots in China and the situation of the Chinese Autonomous Orthodox Church.

Metropolitan Hilarion noted that the Russian Orthodox Church and the People's Republic of China carry on a dialogue on the revival of the Chinese Orthodox Church: "Our aim in this dialogue is to give an opportunity to Orthodox faithful in China, our compatriots and Chinese people, to practice their faith freely".

The Archpastor said with regret that the current situation in China "is not very favourable": "Many Orthodox churches in China are either closed or function nominally, without priests. I happened to visit such churches and talk to the faithful who come on Sundays to light candles and pray at icons. However services are not celebrated in these churches because there are no clerics there."

So far the attempts, made by the hierarchy of the Russian Orthodox Church to come to an agreement with the authorities of the People's Republic of China about sending priests to China, were met with some resistance. "Today we see some progress in this dialogue. For example, very soon two students will be sent to Russia to study at the Moscow and St.-Petersburg Theological Academies. We hope they might become priests after graduation and serve in China", the DECR chairman said. He regards this fact as "the first and cautious steps" in normalizing the situation of the Chinese Autonomous Church.