Metropolitan Hilarion's lecture on 'An Era of New Martyrdom. Discrimination of Christians in Various Parts of the World'

On February 20, 2012, Metropolitan Hilarion, head of the DECR and rector of the Sts Cyril and Methodius Post-Graduate and Doctoral School, visited the Moscow theological schools to deliver the following lecture for the faculty and students:

Your Eminence,

Dear Members of the Faculty of the Moscow Theological Academy,

Brothers and Sisters:

The theme of my lecture is the situation of Christians in the countries in which they constitute a minority. Today this issue has become especially relevant and acute. Our era is rightly called an era of new martyrdom, for in a whole number of countries, Christians are subjected to mass persecution and discrimination.

From November 30 to December 1, 2011, a conference on Freedom of Faith: The Problem of Persecution and Discrimination Against Christians was held at the conference hall of the Danilovskaya Hotel. I made a report to that forum, citing numerous facts of discrimination committed against Christians in various countries.

Last week, *Sedmitsa.ru* launched a special new section on 'Persecution of Christians' [1]. It is called to introduce readers online to the facts of violence against Christians in various parts of the world. I would like also to enumerate several English internet resources. These are mostly websites of human rights organizations specializing in monitoring the situation of Christians and providing materials and legal

support to persecuted Christians.

1) *Christian solidarity Worldwide*, an international organization for protecting persecuted Christians (**http://www.csw.org.uk**). It gives statistics concerning the persecutions according to regions, analytical materials and numerous video clips. Based in Great Britain, this organization also provides legal support for Christians persecuted in countries in which the Christian confession is prohibited in this or that form.

2) *International Christian Concern*, a US human rights organization maintaining at **http://www.persecution.org** an internet resource called 'Persecution'. It is an important resource which includes a detailed survey according to world regions and particular countries.

3) *Barnabas Fund,* an international organization (**http://www.barnabasaid.org**) which publishes the latest news about facts of the killing and persecution of Christians in the world. There is a solid bulk of related news concerning the latest events in Syria and Egypt. This organization is one of the few ones which organize continuous help to Christians in Syria whose situation is getting worse with every day because of the actions of militants.

4) *Open Doors*, an international organization (**http://www.opendoorsuk.org**) which places on its website detailed surveys according to countries and continents. Recently it has published an annual list of 50 countries in which Christians are subjected to the severe discrimination, the so-called 'World Watch List'. Countries are divided into four groups according to the extent of pressure brought to bear on their Christian communities.

The Christian Church began to be persecuted since the very first years of its existence. The Church is a divine-human organism; it belongs at the same time to the upper and lower worlds. The Archenemy cannot reconcile himself to its nature being not of this world. The Lord Jesus Christ said on several occasions that Christians would be persecuted in the world: 'If they persecuted me, they will persecute you also (Jn. 15:20).

The Lord predicted the persecution of Christians in the world: 'They will lay their hands on you and persecute you, delivering you up to the synagogues and prisons, and you will be brought before kings and governors for my name's sake…' (Lk. 21:12).

In my report on the Persecution and Discrimination of Christians in Today's World: Causes, Scale, Prognoses for the Future' made at the above-mentioned conference on November 30, 2011, in Moscow, I cited many facts of the persecution of Christians. Therefore in this survey of the situation in the world I would like to make today, I will dwell mostly on the facts that have taken place since that

time.

A matter of the greatest concern is the recent increase in anti-Christian actions in the two countries in which Christians comprise at least 10% of the population, namely, in Egypt and Syria.

According to the 2007 data, there were 107 million people in Egypt, most of them being Arabs – 91,9%. Almost all of them (90% of the population) confess Islam. Christians live mostly in Cairo, Alexandria and other major cities. They comprise about 10% of the population.

After the events of January-February 2011, a clear tendency has developed to make the sharia the only legal system in that country. It should be taken into account that those who demand the introduction of the sharia today are usually adherents of radical views whereby Christians are equated with pagans and should be converted therefore to Islam. I believe the sharia should be applied to Muslims alone; it by no means should be applied to Christians. It is my conviction that both Christians and Muslims should have the same rights and guarantees granted by the state.

Throughout 2011, Christians in Egypt continued to be objects of attacks. In my report I have cited many examples of this. The authorities of that country, instead of protecting Christians, have sometimes themselves become sources of violence towards them. On October 9, the Copts organized a demonstration in the Egyptian capital, but armed forces under the command of the Egyptian Military Council broke it up and as a result over 20 Christians were killed and over 200 injured. Christians were literarily crushed by military vehicles.

After the January parliamentary elections, which resulted in the Muslim Brotherhood and Salafites getting a majority of seats, the situation of Christians became even worse. The Freedom and Justice Party (*Ḥizb Al-Ḥurriya wa Al-'Adala*), the political wing of the Muslim Brotherhood, won 230 seats out of 498. The Salafite Nour (Light) Party occupied the second place, obtaining in total some 120 seats. It should be noted that the Muslim Brotherhood has recently adopted a policy of protecting the Copts. Thus, during Christmas and New Year celebrations this year, young members of the Muslim Brotherhood set up local committee for protecting Christian churches against the attacks of the Salafites who believe the Christmas and New Year celebrations to be anti-Islamic.

The same Salafites, addressing Christians, declared that, in accordance with the sharia, they were either to pay *juzia* (poll tax) as non-Muslims should, or leave the country. The Salafites destroyed churches and Christians' houses and killed them. They established a Committee for Encouraging Virtue and Preventing Vice in Egypt, like the one acting in Saudi Arabia. In September 2011, the report of the Egyptian Union for Human Rights stated that in the period from January to September 2011, the harassment by the Salafites made 100 thousand Copts flee the country.

If before the above-mentioned elections there were numerous, though uncoordinated anti-Christian raids of radicals, after coming to power the radicals started the ‘cleansing’ of whole settlements from Christians. Here are some examples.

On January 27, the Copts in the al-Ameria district near Alexandria were attacked by some 3 thousand Muslims led by Salafi leaders who burnt down their houses and shops. On January 30, a crowd of Mulsims attacked the Sharbat village for the second time, setting to fire three Christian houses before the eyes of law-enforcement officers. After that Islamic representatives demanded that Luis Suleiman, a rich Coptic businessman, should be driven away from the village, accusing him and his sons of shooting in the air when their house was set on fire. Suleiman’s family denied that they used guns, the more so that nobody was injured. Nevertheless, the police drew on Suleiman’s sons an arrest warrant. On February 1, the Salafites demanded that several Coptic families should be driven away from al-Ameria and suggested that the property of the Suleiman family be sold out under supervision of the Salafite sheikh Sherif al-Havari. Otherwise, they threatened, the village would be immediately attacked once again and then all the Coptic houses would be burnt down.

In February, a crowd led by Salafite leaders set on fire the Coptic church and Christian houses in the Meet Bashar village north-east of Cairo.[2] Taking part in another act of violence against Christians were about 2 thousand Islamic extremists. As a result, the church of St. Mary at the Meet Bashar village in Zagazig, Sharkeya Province (some 50 km north-east of Cairo) was burnt down.

Muslims and Christians of various confessions – Orthodox, Roman and Syro Catholics, Maronites and Armenians – co-existed in **Syria** through centuries. Until recently Syria was a model of wellbeing as far as interreligious co-existence was concerned. There were no interreligious conflicts; Muslims and Christians lived side by side in mutual understanding; Christian holy places were open to pilgrims. Syria has accepted over 2 million refugees from Iraq, with several thousands of them being Christians. They hoped to escape there from persecution in their homeland.

Today Syria is going through a difficult time. External forces seek to enkindle a conflict between communities and religions. We are especially concerned for the fate of the religious minorities in Syria, especially Orthodox Christians who represent the oldest religious community among those existing in the Syrian land.

It is possible already now to speak of an external military interference in that country as thousands of extremist militants in the guise of opposition forces have unleashed a civil war in the country. Extremist groups, the so-called jamaates consisting of militant Wahhabites armed and trained at the expense of foreign powers are purposefully killing Christians.

On January 15, two Christians were killed in a breadline. A 40 year-old Christian was shot to death by three armed people when he was driving his two small sons. The Russian Church was deeply grieved by a report about the tragic death of Fr. Baselios Nassar of the Epiphania diocese of the Orthodox Church of Antioch on January 25 and the shelling of the ancient Saydnaya Monastery from a portable gun.

Last week at least 200 Christians including small children were killed in the city of Homs. The abduction of Christians and other non-Sunni people has acquired a major scale. Two Christians, 28 and 37, were kidnapped and later found dead. One was hanged, his body bearing numerous wounds, another was dismembers and thrown into the river. His pregnant wife survived him. Four more Christians were abducted and the perpetrators have threatened to kill him if a ransom was not paid in time.

These recent reports about anti-Christian violence very strongly remind me of those which became customary since US troops invaded Iraq in 2003. All this arouses serious fears for the future of Christians in Syria.

After the UN General Assembly adopted, despite Russia's protests, a resolution directed against the Syrian government, an opportunity has been opened for foreign military forces to move in the country, as was the case with Libya. In this case, a large-scale civil war may begin to last many years with scores of innocent people killed. Many Muslims will associate the foreign invasion with interference by the Christian world, while local Christians, just as it was during the Crusades, would have to account for the aggressors' actions, sometime by their own deaths. Christians will become hostages and the first victims of this military conflict.

Reports are coming that several thousands of Christian civilians have already become victims of armed extremists and the cases of the abduction of Christians for ransom have become more frequent. There is a threat that any further destabilization will dramatically affect the fate of religious minorities, especially Syrian Christians.

On November 12-12, 2011, His Holiness Patriarch Kirill made a visit to Syria. During his meetings with His Beatitude Patriarch Ignatios and the Supreme Mufti of Syria Ahmed Badr-ad-Din Hassoum and the Minister of Waqfs Abd-as-Sattar Said, he underscored that a solution of the present problems of the Syrian people is possible only through peace dialogue and that any manifestations of extremism and violence were inadmissible.

Let us address the situation in the countries in which the interreligious balance has been violated as a result of the interference of external forces. After Muammar Gaddafi's regime was overthrown in **Libya**

and the Transitional National Council took over, Libya has become a place from which Christians have been actively driven away. Before the foreign interference in this country, Christians – Copts, Orthodox Christians, Catholics, Anglicans and members of other Protestant denominations – comprised about 3% of the population. According to the Open Doors human rights organization, 75% of Christians in Libya, most of them being guest workers, left the country during the armed conflict.

Until 2003, in **Iraq** there were over one and a half million Christians. At present, almost nine-tenth of them have either fled or were killed while those who have remained live daily with a fear for their lives. Among Iraqi Christians there are members of the Assyrian Church of the East, Chaldean Catholics, Armenians, Syro Catholics and Orthodox Christians. As recently as ten years ago, Christians in Iraq could feel relatively safe. With the foreign military intervention, Islamic militants launched terror actions against Christians. The latter found themselves the most unprotected stratum of the population.

Hundreds of Christian families have fled to the northern Kurdish regions in Iraq or neighbouring countries. Recently I have met some leaders of Sadr the Second's Movement, an Iraqi Shia religio-political movement. They assured me that Christians living in areas controlled by their movement, namely, southern parts of the country and some quarters in Baghdad were protected by this movement.

Last September, with my blessing, a DECR representative visited northern Iraq including the cities of Erbil, Duhok, Semel, El-Kush and others. Ethnically, the 6 million-strong North Iraq is populated mostly by Kurds and Ezides. The Christian population in this region is small but it has increased in recent years with the migration of Christians from the south and Arab regions. For instance, in Duhok the number of Christians – Assyrians and Chaldeans, is 30 000, that is, 10% of the city's total population. The authorities in northern Iraq, which is *de facto* a self-governed region, seek to ensure the safety of Christians. Our representative met with Christian refugees from the south who told him how Islamists had broken in their houses and demanded from them large amounts of money so that they could buy weapons to fight American aggressors. They beat up their family members, killed or kidnapped some of them. The attackers concealed their faces under masks – an indication that they were neighbours or acquaintances. In recent years, abdications of Catholic clergy have become more frequent, with abductors demanding that the Vatican pay a ransom of as much as several hundred thousand dollars. The ransom for kidnapped ordinary people cost from 10 to 15 thousand dollars.

The wave of violence against Christians in Iraq, regrettably, has not abated in recent months. On December 5, 2011, after the sermon of a certain imam, some Islamists, excited by his words, destroyed scores of shops, houses and other facilities belonging to Christians in Zakho, a town with 200 000 inhabitants. After the pogroms against Christians in Zakho, violence spread to neighbouring towns.

In December 2011, in the Iraqi city of Mosul, one of the Christian minority centers in the country,

members of an Islamist group shot to death a Christian married couple. A few days before that, a group of armed militants set on fire Christian shops in Zakho and Duhok. At least 30 people were injured. On January 11, a terror attack was carried out on the residence of the Chaldean Catholic archbishop in Kirkuk.

In **Iran**, there are at least half a million Christians, mostly Assyrians and Armenians. These Christians have their own churches there and an opportunity for confessing their faith. The government shows tolerance towards other religious minorities as well, for instance, Zoroastrians. An Orthodox church has been acting in Tehran for almost 70 years now. It belongs to the jurisdiction of the Russian Orthodox Church. However, cases of discrimination against Christians have happened there too. For instance, a public outcry was aroused by the decision of the court of the Islamic Republic of Iran made on September 22, 2010, sentencing 32 year-old evangelical pastor Yusef Nadarkhani to death for his conversion from Islam to Christianity. Nadarkhani was arrested in 2009. His arrest was preceded by his appeal to the authorities, disputing the law of the Gilyan Province whereby all schoolchildren, his son among them, were obliged to study the Qur'an. According to the investigation, the pastor conducted church services in his house, preached the gospel and baptized those who embraced Christianity. He directed the work of 400 home churches in Iran. In June 2011, the court ordered that the execution be postponed and his case be referred back to Gilyan for a review. It was repeatedly suggested to Pastor Nadarkhani that he should renounce the Christian faith so that he could escape execution but he refused to do it. At present Nadarkhani's fate depends on the Supreme Leader of the country, Ayatollah Khamenei, who is to deliver an official final verdict.

Pakistan is an example of the full suppression of the Christian population. Out of approximately 162 million Pakistanis, Christians, half of them being Catholics, make up only 2,45% of the population. According to the Open Doors organization, there are 5,3 million Christians in the country. The data published by the Pakistani government this January shows that the number of Christians in the country is approximately 3,8 million. Their condition today can be described as catastrophic. In 1986, a law on blasphemy was adopted in Pakistan to become a tool for persecuting religious minorities. This law is often used to squaring personal accounts and to seize other people's property. This law has become a tool for the tough persecution of religious minorities, especially Christians. Last year, at least 161 people were sentenced under the law of 'blasphemy' in Pakistan. Nine people accused of 'blasphemy' and 'outrage against Islam' were executed extrajudicially. Even Muslim legal scholars admit that 95% of all the accusations of 'blasphemy' are false.

Christians are deprived of their rights under this law because a Muslim can report an outrage against Islam without providing witnesses or proof. The law on 'blasphemy' demands that the accused should be immediately sentenced. Recently the death sentence for Asia Bibi – who, asked about her faith, replied that she was a Christian and was accused of 'blasphemy' – was reconfirmed. As of February 1,

2012, over 580 000 people in 100 countries signed an appeal to the Pakistani government to release Asia Bibi. At present, her health is in critical condition.

In 2011, Aslam Masikh, a 30 year-old Christian, died in a Pakistani prison. He too was arrested on the charge of 'blasphemy'. For several months he was denied medical aid because of 'safety considerations'. Recently two more Christians became victims of false accusations – the Protestant bishop Joseph Pervez and Pastor George Baber. They were forced to escape the country after they were incriminated 'blasphemy' and threatened by extremists. Both Christians planned to found an organization for the protection of the Christian community in Pakistan.

Radical Muslims do not stop even at violence against children. In November 2011, they attacked a school in Peshawar. Two people were killed and 14 injured, including 7 children. In January 2012, the Pakistani authorities destroyed the church and charity building in Lahore, which belonged to a Catholic community with close ties to the Caritas.

Many Christian women in Pakistan are forcefully married off to Muslims and forced to change their faith. In 2011, the Asian Human Rights Commission reported that annually about 700 Christian young women in Pakistan are forced to embrace Islam due to pressure or unwanted pregnancy. More often than not, such crimes remain unpunished. After an 18 year-old Catholic girl was killed early this year for her refusal to adopt Islam, the General Vicar of Faisalabad, Fr. Khalid Rashid, stated in his interview to the Fides agency that 'cases like this one happen in Punjab every day'. Thus recently, the European mass media wrote about Sonya Bibi, a 20 year-old Christian who was beat up and raped by a group of Muslims and about Rebecca Bibi, 12, who lost sight after she was beat up by her Muslim employer.

According to the Conference of Catholic Bishops in Pakistan, over 700 cases of forceful conversion to Islam are registered annually in Pakistan today. The report entitled' Monitoring Human Rights-2011' records numerous cases of human rights violations and discrimination against Christians and other religious minorities in Pakistan. In January 2012, a Catholic priest who had served in the country for eight years was arrested in Pakistan [3].

According to Open Doors, about 10 thousand people confess Christianity out of 28,4 million inhabitants of **Afghanistan.** The last commonly accessible Christian church in Afghanistan was demolished in March 2010. Most of today's Christians in the country are urban people who had been baptized before the US troops moved in the country, or young people who came to know the Christian teaching during their trips abroad or through their contacts with Christian visitors to Afghanistan. They have to conceal their beliefs and have no legal opportunity for opening churches, thus having to worship in private houses. Most of Christian Afghanis are Catholic or Protestant. Conversion from Islam to other faith is viewed as a grave crime, and Christians are often subjected to persecution by extremists.

In 2010, an Afghani Christian by name of Said Mousa, the father of a large family who worked at the Red Cross medical center in Kabul, was put on trial for participation in Christian rites. Said Mousa was not the first Christian to be put on public trial in recent years. Investigators succeeded in making him renounce his faith in public. It was shown on the national TV but recently his letter has fallen into the hands of human rights workers, from which it appears that he is still under arrest in one of the prisons in Kabul and is subjected to beating and sexual assaults by his cellmates. In his letter Said says that he deeply regrets his renunciation of Christ.

Let us address the situation in other countries in **Africa.**

In **Algeria**, for the last five years the authorities have not permitted to open Christian churches. Since recently, 'a law on blasphemy', similar to the Pakistani one, has been enforced there. According to official information, there are some 11 thousand Christians, most of them Catholics, live in the 36 million-strong Algiers. According to non-official information, the number of clandestine Christians is many times as many. A law adopted in 2006 forbids mission among Muslims. In 2011, the authorities of the Bedjaya Province closed 7 Christian churches. In recent months, there have been an increasing number of cases of religious intolerance towards Christians. In early February 2012, unknown people under the cover of night attacked an Evangelical church in the city of Ouargla 700 km away from the capital. The house-beakers penetrated into the church territory, destroyed the cast-iron crucifix on the terrace roof of the church and damaged the gates. In doing so, the pastor says, the attackers yelled threats [4].

In **North Sudan,** from which South Sudan separated in summer 2011, acts of violence against Christians continue unabated. The new authorities of the country have stated that 'the Sharia and Islam will now become in Sudan the basis of a new constitution, with Islam as the official religion and Arabic as the official language'. Reports are coming from North Sudan about numerous purposeful attacks on Christians who have had to flee to South Sudan.

The authorities have failed to take measures for the protection of Christians. Almost a year ago, a 15 year-old Christian girl was kidnapped in North Sudan. Her mother said that she had repeatedly appealed to the police to open the case and to begin a search for her daughter. But as a reply she heard only demands that she should first embrace Islam and only after that seek help from the Islamic police. On June 8, 2011, armed extremists fired at a Catholic church during the mass.

Radicals are standing behind the persecution of Christians in another African country, 150 million-strong **Nigeria.** Today this most densely populated country in Africa is experiencing another bloody crisis. The

country is actually divided into two halves – the Muslim North and the Christian South. In the North Nigeria, there are 27 million Christians out of the 70 million population and they are subjected to systematic elimination by radical groups.

Since the sharia was introduced in the 12 northern states in 2000, thousands of people have been killed in numerous clashes in recent years. In the captured areas, sharia courts are established and sharia 'justice' is administered. Militants of the local extremist organizations, the most notorious among them being the Boko Haram group, have regularly attacked Christian settlements. In summer 2011, radicals burnt to the ground Christian churches and houses and robbed Christian households. In August 2011, 24 Christians were killed in an attack of armed Islamists on Christian villages in the central part of the country. In early November 2011, over 150 people were killed in terror actions at the towns of Maiduguri and Damaturu. Almost all the Christians had to flee from these regions. During the Christmas night of December 25, 2011, another monstrous act of terror was committed. The number of Christians killed in Nigeria's city of Jos exceeded 80. In addition, over 200 people were injured in 9 explosions that shook the city.

On January 22, bombs blasted again in two Christian churches in Nigeria. One of them is the Catholic parish in Bauchi state in northern Nigeria. An increasing number of Christians have to flee from North Nigeria to other parts of the country. About 35 000 Christians have fled from North Nigeria during the last weeks after Boko Haram issued an ultimatum demanding that Christians should leave the territories with the predominant Muslim population. In 2011, the Boko Haram militants killed at least 700 people in North Nigeria. In total, over 13 000 people, most of them Christians, have been killed in the last 10 years in interreligious clashes.

In **Somalia**, the number of Christians is estimated to make up 1% of the total population of approximately 5 thousand people. Most of these Christians were either Muslims in the past or their parents were. Therefore, the majority treats them as betrayers of their faith. There are no organized Christian communities, and Christians live in permanent fear and an atmosphere of terror. It is especially dangerous to raise one's children in the Christian tradition. The radical group Ash-Shabaab controlling almost the entire territory of the country has openly stated its intention to eradicate Christianity in Somalia. The official government, while declaring the right to religious freedom, has done nothing to protect Christians. Many Christians were killed last year. In January 2012, a Christian woman was sentenced to 40 lashes. The corporal punishment was carried out before the eyes of thousands. She lost consciousness but survived and was handed over to her family [5]. On February 10, extremists from Ash-Shabaab killed a 26 year-old Christian at a place near the capital city of Mogadishu [6].

In Somalia there lived one of the martyrs of our days, Mourta Farah. This 17 year-old girl was shot to death in November 2010 for her conversion to Christianity. It happened only 200 metres away from the

house in which she stayed with her relatives. Mourta's parents, in the attempt to make her renounce Christ, tied the girl to a tree at day-time and at night put her in a small dark room. But they tried in vain. Then her parents decided that she went mad and tried to 'heal' her by special medicines. But in May 2010 she managed to escape to her relatives and after that she was killed.

In the semi-autonomous island of **Zanzibar,** a part of Tanzania, Christians live under continuous pressure from the Islamic community. Many Christians are forcefully converted to Islam and they are refused employment. Early this year, a Christian in whose house a Bible was found was sentenced to 8-month imprisonment.

In the countries of **the Arabian Peninsula**, Christianity is under a ban everywhere. Guest workers are Christians, mostly from Philippines, who are at least a million and a half. They are subjected to persecution. There are also Christian converts from Islam who have to carefully conceal their faith. According to Open Doors, this country occupies the third place in the world in the level of Christian persecution. In 2011, there was a series of arrests of Christians for their joint prayers at private houses. In January 2011, the Christians Johan Nes and Vasantha Sehar Vara were arrested. The police cruelly beat them up and placed them in horrific conditions.

Thirty five Ethiopian Christians were arrested during a police raid in Djidda in December 2011, when Christians assembled for a common prayer. New agencies have reported that these Christians are still confined and forced to convert to Islam. Human Rights Watch has circulated reports that in prison they are abused by prison guards. The women were subjected to humiliating examination; the men were beat up. The fate of these Christians has not been decided as yet. In this connection, demonstrations have been conducted at the Saudi Arabia embassies throughout the world.

Let us address the situation in **South and South-East Asia and the Far East.** According to Open Doors, in North Korea about 70 thousand Christians are now serve sentences in 30 labour camps. Out of 24 million inhabitants of the country, some 400 thousands are Christians. State statistics points out that 4 thousands among them are Catholics. The rest are mostly Protestants of various denominations.

Religious freedom remains a taboo in **the Maldives.** The Sunnite form of Islam was declared the official religion in Maldive Islands by the 1997 Constitution. This provision was also reconfirmed by the 2008 Constitution. The proclamation of other religions except Islam is forbidden. One can be imprisoned for keeping a Bible. On the one hand, the island state positions itself as a center of world tourism and seeks to attract tourists from all over the world. On the other hand, it pursues the policy of intolerance and religious discrimination, arresting innocent people.

The situation in **Bangladesh** is a matter of great anxiety. The lands and property of Christians in the

mountainous region of Rangamati and in the Gulishahali Region are taken away. According to Fides, most often these criminal actions have been committed by Muslims who predominate there and have not been punished. Neither the police nor the civil authorities guarantee the protection of the rights of ethnic and religious minorities.

Anti-Christian forces have become more active in **Indonesia**. At present this country is the most densely populated Muslim country. Out of 228,5 million inhabitants of Indonesia 86% are Muslims, 6% are adherents of various trends of Protestantism, and 3% confess Catholicism. There are several scores of Orthodox parishes. Since 2006, 200 Christian churches were attacked in Indonesia, with 14 of them attacked only for the first five months of 2011. On February 24, 2011, the Orthodox church of St. Catherine was attacked by extremists at Bojolali in the Island of Java.

In **Philippines,** most people confess Catholicism. However, in the Islands of Jolo and Mindanao inhabited by Muslims, a movement called Abu Sayyaf appeared in the 1990s and established relations with Al-Qaeda. For the last 10 years 120 thousand people were killed in Mindanao as a result of the activity of terror groups, and 500 thousand people have become refugees.

About 70% of the people in **Laos** confess Buddhism, 30% are heathens and 1,5% are Christians. Christians are deprived of the right to occupy public posts and have little chance to enter a university. In 2009, the leader of Salawan Province gathered together all the rural dwellers and announced to them that ‘Christianity is forbidden’. He also said that ‘the worship of spirits’ was the only acceptable cult for them. At his instruction, cattle were confiscated from local Christians. Repressions continue to this day.

In one of the most densely populated country of the world, **India**, Christians suffer from radical Hindu organizations. India’s population total 1,1 billion. Over 2% of the people are Christians. In total in India there are 23-24 million Christians of various denominations. Some 70% of the Indian Christians come from the untouchables. In the state of Orissa where a great proportion of the untouchables live, the number of conversions to Christianity has considerably grown in the last decade. In some areas of the state, the proportion of Christians has doubled in this period. In 2008, the state became a place of mass killings of Christians and pogroms of Christian churches and houses which lasted for two months.

During the pogroms in 2008 in India, 500 Christians were killed. The opposition Hindu nationalist party ‘The Bharataya Janata Party’ (BJP), which actually controls several states, has waged an active war against Christianity. On February 20 and 21, 2011, a wave of clashes between extremists and the Christian minority swamped Batala in the state of Punjab. Members of Christian communities in India continue to be attacked by organized groups of radical Hindus.

In 2011 in India, there were 2141 registered cases of violence against Christians. According to the

report presented by the Catholic Secular Forum, attacks on Christian by extremist Hindu groups are taking place at present in almost all the states of India. The authors of the report assume that the real number of cases of anti-Christian violence in India which took place last years must be three times as many. The statistics they presented is based on the information publicized by the mass media. In 2012, new cases of discrimination against Christians and attacks on Christian educational institutions were registered in India. Early in February, about 100 Hindu radicals attacked the campus of the Jesuit University of St. Joseph in Anekal near Bangalore, Karnataka state.

I should address **the causes of the growing persecution of Christians** in the recent years.

Since your schooldays you remember that the causes of the persecution of Christians in old times can be divided in the three groups: **social, religious and political.** To a considerable extent these causes have remained the same, with certain reservations.

We understand by **social** causes the poorly motivated hatred of the crowd. Heathen writers and Christian apologists unanimously testify that the emergence and spreading of Christianity was met by the population of the Roman Empire with unanimous hatred on the part of both the lower strata of the society and the educated class. ‘What damage do we do to you, Hellenes? Why do you hate us like the most out-and-out scoundrels who follow the word of God?’ Tertullian questioned. ‘How many times the mob hostile to us has attacked us, thrown stones and burnt our houses. They do not spare Christians, even dead ones, pulling out dead bodies from coffins to abuse them, to tear them to pieces’, cried out this Christian writer of the 3d century. The hatred of the throng towards Christians grew especially at times of social troubles. In some sense, the events repeat themselves since the psychology of the crowd, if this crows is consumed with hysteria, does not change whatever the religion those who make up the crowd may be. The crowd needs an enemy to take it out on him; the otherness of Christians excited and excites the hatred of ‘this world’.

Religious causes lied in that in antiquity the heathen society saw in Christianity an inadmissible religion whose followers were believed to challenge the predominant religious or quasi-religious ideology. Today, the most irreconcilable attitude to Christians is characteristic of the countries in which the Sharia laws are established. According to the American commission for religious freedom in the world, out of ten countries in which Christians live in the hardest situation, nine are Muslim ones.

The **political** causes of the aggravation of Christians’ situation are, in my view, the principal ones. In the early centuries of the life of the Church, Christians were persecuted because they were seen as enemies of the Caesar because they refused to worship him. The legal system of the Roman Empire made on confessors such demands that could not be accepted if they wished to remain Christian. The same demands unacceptable to Christians are made in some countries which adopted laws on ‘blasphemy’.

Under this law, the very confession of Christ as God is declared a blasphemy, which puts Christians before the choice to remain Christian and suffer, may be even to death, or to renounce their faith.

Today Christians are becoming hostages to a big political game around the geo-strategic redivision of the Middle East and Africa. The richest countries of the Arabian Peninsula, such as Saudi Arabia and Qatar, have invested millions of dollars in the destabilization of the situation in other countries of the region. The radical Islam of the Wahhabi school has been exported to the countries of which it has never been characteristic. Actually, Wahhabism is a political doctrine which makes use of religious vocabulary. It is political extremism and a hate ideology with religion as a cover.

There are a great deal of books and internet resources created by those who claim to be Muslims, who preach hatred and call to kill people of other religions, especially Christians. In spite of the Qur'an's prohibition of violence towards Christians as 'a people of the Book', they have appropriated the authority and right to decide which followers of Christ deserve death. The ideologies of radical organizations call to the total elimination of all Christians. At best, Christians may be allowed to live as third-rate people provided they pay a special tax for the Muslims' right to live on earth. It is indicative that these people victimize not only Christians but also Mulsims who, being adherents to the traditional schools of Islam, are declared 'apostates' or 'hypocrites'.

The export of Salafism, a radical Islamic school, began in the 1970s. It came from the Arabian Peninsula to the neighbouring regions and later to more remote countries. By 2000, its adherents have spread throughout the world, and today Salafism has come to play an important role in Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates, Kuwait, Qatar, Sudan and Afghanistan. The supporters of this movement seek to achieve the political goal of building a universal Islamic state (caliphate) so that the life of the society could be built on the sharia postulates alone in its extreme form, the Hanbalist school. The distinctive features of the political doctrine of Salafism include implacable attitude to the secular civil society, desire to replace it by an Islamic one based of the sharia, inadmissibility of a separate existence of religion and state, the contrasting of the Islamic world to the rest civilization models, negation of all the non-Islamic laws and desire to eliminate Christianity which is equated with paganism. In the 1990s, Salafi grouping appeared en mass in almost all the areas where Islam is prevalent. At present there are at least half a thousand of such associations, the most well-known among them Al-Qaeda, Jihad in Egypt, Islamic Jihad in Palestine, Ansar al-Islam in Iraq, Jemaah Islamiya, which has been active in Malaisia, etc [8].

Today this religio-political ideology is propagated with the help of modern information technologies, such as social networks, etc. In my view, radicalism is generated by ignorance. When people have a poor knowledge of their faith and, even worse, the faith of their neighbours, their ignorance gives grounds for aggression against Christians. Human beings have a sinful nature; they are prone to the impact of the aggressive principle and religious motives are used to give vent to it.

Islamic societies with their low level of religious education have proved to be the most vulnerable to Wahhabism, another Islamic school. For its followers traditional Islam points to the need to overcome aggressive emotions. It is not accidental that A. Ignatentko, an authoritative Russian specialist in Islamic studies, describes Wahhabism as an ideology of hatred because it is built on the postulate that the faithful should cultivate hatred as prescribed from above.

Regrettably, the Islamic society has not yet found a way of effective struggle with the propagation of religious extremism. In some countries, when representatives of this school come to power, the persecution and even total extermination of religious minorities begin.

It would be wrong however to place responsibility for these developments only on ignorant extremist fanatics who act in a spontaneous and disorderly way, almost single-handed. More often than not, standing behind them are forces whose primary aim is to profit from the situation of chaos and confusion. The success of these people is paid by blood.

Another political factor aggravating the situation of Christians is Western interference in the affairs of the region. The systems which have restrained radicalism in the last decades have been destroyed by the military force of the USA and NATO as was the case in Iraq and Libya or by incited revolutions as was the case in Egypt and other Arab countries.

There are also other causes of the growing discrimination of Christians in recent years. It should be mentioned that among the reasons for the aggravation of relations between Christians and Muslims in several countries, especially in Africa, is the practice of aggressive mission used by evangelical churches whose preachers have carried out an active work among local Muslim populations with the purpose to convert them to Christianity. If the preaching allows of destruction of Islam, it adds more fuel to the fire. Besides, foreign missionaries, as we know from the experience of our country, can also pursue political aims.

Clearly, we should also take into account various incentives motivating the persecutors of Christians in each country. For instance, while in Egypt Christians are attacked and killed and their churches and houses are burnt down, in Iraq they are more often kidnapped, made to pay ransom or taken hostage, though reports are often coming about blasting Christians churches in this country too.

One of the indirect causes that have triggered the mass persecution of Christians is Europe’s renunciation of its own Christian identity. The process of secularization has led to the situation in which most Europeans have ceased to relate their life to the Gospel and begun to live up the secular standards of ‘consumer society’. In the eyes of traditional societies, such as Islamic peoples, this ‘post-Christian’

civilization is losing any meaning or value. Muslims have begun to attribute to Christians the blame that has nothing to do with them but either with the US policy in the Middle East countries or the pernicious influence of ‘consumer society’. I mean the intensified imposition of secular standards and norms of life on bearers of traditional cultures. The protest against this imposition has sometimes resulted in anti-Christian actions.

Another cause of anti-Christian moods is the fact that some Protestants in the West, especially charismatics, have committed a deep distortion of Christianity. Regrettably, Muslims have often identified their views with common Christian ones. We can see today how leaders of various charismatic sects who name themselves Christian churches provoke people to commit ill-considered actions for the sake of their own PR image. This leads to a distortion of the image of Christianity, just as actions of Islamic sects present Islam in a corrupted form.

In recent years, public and governmental organizations in Europe have given some attention to the problem of discrimination against Christians in the world, though it appears insufficient.

Last June, when in Budapest I met with a representative of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), Prof. Massimo Introvigne from Italy, who has studied this issue for several years. Last autumn, we invited him to Moscow for a conference ‘Freedom of Faith: the Problem of Discrimination and Persecution against Christians’. Quite recently an Observatory for Religious Freedom has been established in Rome. This year it will conduct a conference devoted to the protection of religious minorities in various countries.

On January 20, 2011, the PACE adopted a Resolution on the Situation of Christians in the Context of Freedom of Religion, which condemns the killing and discrimination of Christian in various countries, in particular, Egypt, Nigeria, Pakistan, Iran, Iraq and Philippines. The resolution addressed to the governments and parliaments in these countries was adopted by a majority of votes. Voting for it were representatives of all the political parties present in the European Parliament. The deputies agreed to set up a standing body at the European External Action Service to monitor the religious freedom situation in the world and to present annual reports to the EU and public at large concerning the cases of infringement on freedom of conscience by authorities or public forces in various countries.

This resolution of the European Parliament is important for several reasons. First, European politicians spoke out on the problem which had so far been voiced only on the periphery. Thus, the existence of persecution of Christians in the world was recognized by one of the major political bodies of the European Union. Secondly, for the first time a close attention was given to the work of those engaged in collecting objective information about the persecution of Christians in the world. Thirdly, in its resolution the European Parliament proposed specific ways of influencing the situation. Their principle is simple:

money and business in exchange for compliance with human rights. Economic agreements between the European Union member states and countries with registered violations of the religious freedom of Christians and other religious minorities should be concluded only if they improve the situation of religious groups whose rights are infringed. Fourthly, the resolution gives much attention to the need to observe religious freedom as fixed in the fundamental international and European conventions and contains a proposal to establish mechanisms for monitoring religious freedom. At the same time, these important and timely calls will lead to desired results only if they are followed by the establishment of an effective and regular mechanism of dialogue between religious communities and national and international structures.

On September 22, 2011, UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon called to oppose the discrimination against Christians, underscoring that prejudice concerning particular persons based on religious identity is inadmissible. The Committee on Political Affairs of the Council of Europe Parliamentary Assembly at its meeting on November 15, 2011, in Paris adopted a statement concerning the violent actions against Christians in Egypt. This statement was prompted by the events which took place on October 9, 2011, in Cairo: ‘This violence, which was duly condemned by the President of the Assembly, is of course unacceptable and the first declarations of the Egyptian authorities and their subsequent lack of action fail to convince that they are genuinely committed to dealing effectively with recurrent inter-religious violence’.

We are convinced that it is necessary to create, on the basis of international mechanisms of the protection of religious minorities, some standing effective centers for collecting and studying information about persecutions on religious grounds with the task to monitor the situation in this area and to prepare appropriate decisions for the executive bodies of international structures. The UN can and must see to it that the governments in some of its member states observe the commonly accepted norms of religious freedom. This should apply not only to Christians but also believers of any other religion whose freedom of conscience and faith needs to be secured legally and protected against encroachments by extremists.

It is not for the first time that our Church speaks of the persecution of Christians in the world. In May 2011, the Holy Synod of the Russian Orthodox Church adopted a document in which our Church not only condemned the persecution of Christians but also called the world public to give close attention to this problem and to work out together common measures for the struggle with discrimination against Christians.

The Russian Orthodox Church spoke out and will continue speaking out against any form of xenophobia, religious intolerance and extremism. We understood the indignation of Muslims at the publication of caricatures of Mohammed in one of the Scandinavian magazines. We supported them after France adopted a law forbidding Muslim women to wear hijabs in public institutions. With sincere

interest we are ready to discuss with our Muslim brothers the issues of public morality and to maintain cooperation with them in the most pressing areas, in a word, to develop an open and honest dialogue.

An intensive interreligious and intercultural dialogue is one of the ways of combatting the discrimination of Christians. It can play an important role in creating conditions necessary for normalizing interreligious relations in the troubled regions of the world.

A unique experience of peaceful coexistence of religions traditional for Russia has been accumulated in our country. And this experience can be useful for other countries and peoples as well.

Conducting dialogue with people of other religions, we work to overcome inter-ethnic, political and interreligious conflicts. This dialogue allows us to come to a better understanding of each other and to overcome false stereotypes which often generate hatred and aggression towards people of other faiths.

It is only through common efforts that it is possible to oppose the manifestation of extremism on religious grounds, which, among other things, generates confrontation and conflict between adherents to different religions. It must be taken into account that persecutions on religious grounds are committed not only against Christians but also people of other traditional religions – Muslims and Jews. Defending ones, we should not forget others wherever particular believers may need such protection.

We often hear today that it is necessary to create for persecuted Christians the conditions allowing them to freely emigrate to third countries. It is my conviction that such efforts will only profit their persecutors. Their aim is precisely to oust the Christian population, to force them to emigrate. On the contrary, all those who claim to be people of good will and peace should help Christians feel safe in the land of their forefathers and make their own contribution to the prosperity of their homeland. They should not feel themselves second-hand citizens or ‘the fifth column’ of the West. Christian youth in these countries should be given to understand that their future is linked with their homeland, that they do not live in it as undesired guests whose existence is merely tolerated by the majority but rather as equal sons and daughters.

It should be noted that the joint actions already undertaken by Churches and international and public organizations to improve the situation of Christians in countries where they constitute a minority have already brought their fruits. We are convinced that all the states are called to ensure to people a guaranteed opportunity for confessing their faith, raising their children in Christian faith and representing and defending their position in public, without being persecuted.

The Russian Church sincerely hopes that the governments of European countries, whose culture and traditions have been formed on the basis of Christian values, will demand that the states where

Christians are persecuted follow the international principles of religious freedom and ensure it. Just as in European countries, the rights of religious minorities should be invariably protected by law.

We also appeal to the leaders of the countries belonging to the canonical jurisdiction of the Russian Orthodox Church to consider the issue of discrimination against Christians in their relations with the countries where this discrimination takes place.

At the recent meeting of Prime Minister and presidential candidate V. Putin with leaders of the traditional confessions in Russia, I expressed the wish that the Russian foreign policy had as one of its directions the systematic protection of Christians living in countries where they are persecuted today. I told the prime minister that strong Russia is Russia that defends Christian minorities in these countries, demanding guarantees for the observance of their rights in exchange for political support or economic assistance. Responding to this statement, Mr. Putin said, 'Do not doubt that it will be as you said. No doubt whatsoever'. And he called to further activization of interreligious dialogue.

I have told you all this, dear Brothers and Sisters, so that you could understand that the situation in today's world is very difficult and that we in our country live in relatively peaceful conditions. But we should know what happens in other regions not only because it is necessary to know for our general development but also because we should understand that today's world is a comprehensive whole. The globalization process has gone so far that the processes taking place in one region today are impossible to separate from those happening in other regions.

For us it is very important to export our own experience of interreligious cooperation, the experience our country has accumulated for centuries, to other countries. We can show to people that the existence of different confessions in one country does not mean her necessary susceptibility to conflicts. And we should understand that the struggle with extremism and radicalism has to be waged not only on the level of interreligious dialogue but within every religious confession. It is the task that faces us all.

Thank you for your attention

[1] **http://www.sedmitza.ru/tag/гонения%20на%20христиан**

[2] According to AsiaNews

[3] **http://www.sedmitza.ru/news/2759192.html**

[4] A report by Radio Vatican

[5] According to International Christian Concern

[6] According to Compass Direct News

[7] Cit. in Поснов М.Э. История Христианской Церкви. М., 1991. С. 87.

[8] See, Игнатенко А.А. Расколотая умма в ожидании Судного дня (Новый взгляд со старых позиций) // Отечественные записки. 2003. № 5 (14).

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