Russia will protect Christian minorities in the Middle East

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On February 8, 2012, Prime Minister Vladimir Putin met with leaders of traditional religious communities in Russia. In the course of the meeting Metropolitan Hilarion of Volokolamsk, chairman of the Department for External Church Relations, raised the issue of persecution against Christian minority in a number of countries:

> “I would like to speak about the situation of Christian minority in the Middle East and in some other countries. The regimes in Iraq and in Egypt were overthrown with the assistance of external force and we see that the situation of Christians in these countries has become dramatically worse. One and a half million Christians used to live in Iraq under Saddam Hussein while now there are around one hundred fifty thousand Christians left there. Statistics says that a Christian dies for his or her faith somewhere in the world every five minutes. It is especially true of the Middle East counties: Egypt, Iraq, and Pakistan and Afghanistan as well. The situation in India is taking a dangerous turn nowadays. Christians are killed, Christian women are raped, Christian Churches are burned down, mass exodus of Christians from the lands, where they used to live in peace with Muslims and representatives of other religions, is taking place.”

Metropolitan Hilarion expressed his wish that, if Vladimir Putin wins the presidential election, systematic protection of Christians subjected to persecution in different countries will be one of the trends in Russian foreign policy.

At the conclusion of his speech Metropolitan Hilarion noted that “Strong Russia is the country which protects Christian minorities in these countries and insists on providing guaranties for the rights of Christians being observed in exchange for political support or economic aid.”

Vladimir Putin said in reply: “You can be sure of it. There is no doubt about that.”

The Prime Minister also underscored the importance of interfaith dialogue: “One of the ways to solve the serious problem we face in different countries is to continue international cooperation between religious communities. And of course, maybe even in the first place, it relates to our nearest neighbours. We know that good, even friendly, relations were established between the Muslim leaders in Azerbaijan and the Patriarch, be it the late Patriarch Alexy II or Patriarch Kirill. The influence local, let’s say Muslim, respected leaders have on their people, on Muslims, in their upbringing is of great importance. We also should join our efforts within the country and internationally. If we work together we will surely succeed.”

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