



## **Discussion in Strasbourg on persecution against Christians in the world**

A panel discussion on Religious Freedom and Freedom of Conscience Outside of Europe was held on October 12, 2011, in Strasbourg. There were over 40 people representing various Christian Churches in Europe. The discussion was organized by the Church and Society Commission of the Conference of European Churches. Among the participants were Hegumen Philip Riabykh, Russian Orthodox Church representatives in Strasbourg, as well as representatives of the Roman Catholic Church and the Church of England.

Father Philip introduced the gathering to the efforts made by the Moscow Patriarchate to draw public attention to the persecution against Christians in the Middle East and the need to protect them. He informed the participants that this year His Holiness Patriarch Kirill of Moscow and All Russia had sent three letters to Patriarch Shenouda III of the Coptic Church concerning the killing and pogroms in Egypt that took place early in 2011, as well as in May and October. He also familiarized the meeting with the Patriarchal Statement of October 12, 2011, concerning the disorders in Cairo.

The Strasbourg Representation of the Russian Orthodox Church also distributed among the participants the Statement of the Russian Orthodox Church's Holy Synod on the Growing Manifestations of Christianophobia in the World, made on May 30. Father Philip also spoke about the interventions, trips and talks undertaken by Metropolitan Hilarion of Volokolamsk, head of the Moscow Patriarchate's department for external church relations, to raise the problem of violence against Christians.

The participants also dealt with the actions of international organizations to protect Christians in the world and were introduced to the steps made by the European Union. Father Philip informed the meeting about actions taken by the Council of Europe. He reminded them in particular of the Recommendation of the Council of Europe Parliamentary Assembly (PACE) entitled Violence Against Christians in the Middle East and mentioned the Council of Europe Committee of Minister's reply to this document adopted on September 23, 2011.

The Committee of Minister stated in its reply that in the light of the difficult situation in the Middle East it would continue working out a consistent policy towards neighbouring countries in that region with special attention to Europe's neighbour countries in which cooperation with the Council of Europe will be continued on the basis of common values, human rights, democracy and rule of law.

The Committee of Ministers believes that 'education, interreligious youth work and dialogue are

important tools for helping to prevent and combat such developments'. It also agrees about the need to address anti-Christian stereotypes and bias. According to the Council of Europe Committee of Ministers' document, this work will be carried out by the European Commission against Racism and Intolerance.

*DECR Communication Service*

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