



Russian Orthodox Church Holy Synod's statement on growing manifestations of Christianophobia in the world

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With profound concern the Russian Orthodox Church has taken reports coming from various countries in the world about recurring manifestations of Christianophobia. Christians have been subjected to persecution, becoming victims of intolerance and various forms of discrimination. The recent tragic events in Egypt's Giza on May 7 and 8, when during mass disorders Christian churches were set on fire and parishioners of the Coptic Church were killed, are only one chain in the link of such developments. Our brothers and sisters are killed, driven away from their homes, separated from their relatives and friends, deprived of the right to confess their religious beliefs and to bring up their children according to their faith. Regrettably, the manifestations of Christianophobia cannot be treated as occasional incidents: they have become a settled tendency in some parts of the world.

Discrimination against Christians varies in expression from country to country. In some cases Christians are attacked in hooligan actions, which as a rule are manifestations of extremism on religious grounds. In some countries where Christians are a minority their freedom of faith is considerably restricted with regard to the right to celebrate, to own property and to establish and run theological schools. There are cases where Christians are rendered extremely severe court judgments and given even death sentences according to laws on blasphemy (as disagreement with the beliefs of other religions is described in such cases). But even in those countries where Christianophobia is manifested only in seeing Christians as 'second-rate citizens', our brothers in faith remain in distress. All this leads to the mass emigration of Christians from countries in which they have lived for centuries, as we see it in today's Iraq and some other countries of the Middle East.

At the same time there are manifestations of Christianophobia also in countries where a majority of citizens confess Christianity. The domination of rigid and sometimes even aggressive secularism leads to the forcing Christians out of public life, while public statements and actions motivated by Christian faith, especially its moral assessment of events taking place in a society, rouse a negative reaction.

By drawing the public attention to the growing manifestations of Christianophobia, discrimination and persecution against Christians of various confessions, we do have as our aim to interfere in the internal affairs of state and do not call the world community to do it. Christianity teaches its followers to obey law and to respect lawful governments, according to St. Paul who said, *Let everyone be subject to the governing authorities* (Rom. 13:1). At the same time, governments, too, as responsible before their citizens, are obliged to respect people's dignity and rights and, accordingly, to ensure the free confession of religious faith and security of religious communities.

Nor do we see other religions as sources of Christianophobia. The Russian Orthodox Church has always opposed any discrimination against individuals and peoples on the grounds of their religious affiliation and resolutely condemned any manifestations of anti-Semitism and Islamophobia. Russia, just as other countries under the canonical jurisdiction of the Moscow Patriarchate, has accumulated a rich experience of peaceful coexistence between religions, as well as mutual respect and interreligious solidarity. We are ready to share this experience with all those who wish to build a just society.

Christianophobia is manifested in the first place in situations where religious differences are used in political struggle mostly by extremist forces who pursue their own purposes incompatible with the welfare of the whole society. Such manifestations ought to be unequivocally condemned by all the healthy social forces including public and religious leaders. Discrimination on religious grounds can be overcome only through a broad dialogue involving governments, international organizations, religious communities and the civil society.

We call the world community, religious leaders and all the responsible public forces to develop a comprehensive and effective mechanism for protecting Christians and Christian communities who are subjected to persecution or restrictions in their religious life and work.

The Russian Orthodox Church stands for a more intensive dialogue between religious leaders and the international community for working out foundations for peaceful coexistence between believers belonging to different traditions.

We express solidarity with our brothers and sisters – Christians who are subjected to discrimination, persecution and violence, empathizing with their suffering and deprivations wherever they may be on their earthly journey.

We pray and call the faithful of the Church to augment their prayers for suffering and persecuted brothers and sisters. We pray that they may be strengthened in their faith and spiritual courage.

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