



## **Metropolitan Hilarion: The plight of Christians in many countries of the world is tragic**



Persecution and even extermination of Christians in a number of countries in the Middle East and Africa, as well as discrimination of the believers of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church were the main topics addressed to by Metropolitan Hilarion, chairman of the Moscow Patriarchate's Department for External Church Relations at the International Religious Freedom (IRF) Summit in Washington, D.C.

Speaking at the request of "The Church and the World" TV programme's host Ekaterina Gracheva about this summit that took place in the capital of the United States on July 13-15, 2021, His Eminence said, among other things: "The United States is a diverse country. Despite the anti-Russian propaganda of many years, there are many people there who are very sympathetic both to our country in general, and to the Russian Orthodox Church in particular; they are willing to listen to us. This event was carried out by the Open Doors organization which is following through their studies the situation in different countries with regard to the persecution of religious groups."

The DECR chairman stated that in the recent years the Christians in a number of countries of the Middle East and Africa have been afflicted with tragic developments.

“This is Iraq where under Saddam Hussein the Christian population was one million and a half, but now has one tenth of that number at best. This is also Libya with practically no Christians left; and this is Syria, which many Christians had to flee, forced in most cases not by the war, but by terrorist actions: in areas under their rule, terrorists systematically persecuted and even massacred Christian population,” reminded Metropolitan Hilarion, and underscored that the tragic statistics was witnessing a rapidly dropping number of Christians throughout the Middle East. Even in relatively safe and well-to-do countries, such as Lebanon, the number of Christians is decreasing, whereas not so long ago they used to account for 50% of the country’s population.

His Eminence thinks that the United States is partially responsible for the current situation in so much as “it was that country to have invaded Iraq; it was that country to have promised to establish order and democracy there. But what we see now is that there is no democracy there, that uncontrollable chaos has replaced the overthrown regime, which is what has caused mass exodus, the flight of Christians from the country.”

His Eminence also thinks it important for the United States to have information about the real situation concerning the religious life in Ukraine and the situation of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church which preserves the spiritual unity with the Moscow Patriarchate and which is the largest religious organization in that country.

“Usually, they hear very different from real life information,” remarked the DECR chairman. “For instance, the former US Secretary of State Michael Pompeo, summarizing his work on this post in the Twitter, prided himself on helping the Ukrainian metropolitan to get rid of Moscow’s influence. Even the very wording that was used speaks about the low level of knowledge about the situation in Ukraine that is characteristic of some high-level American statesmen. That is why it was important to speak about what really had happened and is going on, about how priests and parishioners had been driven out of their churches; how they had to pray in the open air; how the parish churches seized by schismatics had been locked and left to stay empty. Let our American partners hear about all this.”

*DECR Communication Service*