



## **DECR vice-chairman calls at the G20 Interfaith Forum to protect Christians in Africa against genocide**



September 13, 2021, the second day of the work of the G20 Interfaith Forum in Bologna, Italy, was devoted to the theme “The time for healing: peace among cultures, understanding between religions”.

With a blessing of His Holiness Patriarch Kirill of Moscow and All Russia, a delegation of the Russian Orthodox Church takes part in the forum. It includes Archbishop Leonid of Vladikavkaz and Alania, vice-chairman of the Moscow Patriarchate Department for External Church Relations (DECR), and Rev. Dimitry Safonov, DECR secretary for interreligious relations. During the second day of the forum, Archbishop Leonid delivered remarks at the focus session on “The Theological Nature of Dialogue”.

The session was chaired by Ms. Alessandra Trotta and Father Adalberto Mainardi of the Monastic Community of Boze. Archbishop Leonid spoke about the experience of interreligious dialogue accumulated by the Russian Orthodox Church, mentioning in particular the work of the Russian-Iranian

Commission for Dialogue “Orthodoxy-Islam”, the Interreligious Council in Russia and the Interreligious Working Group for Aid to the Syrian Population. He noted that the Russian Church has given priority to practical interreligious dialogue: “Together we seek answers to the challenges of today: social, economic, international and others”.

Archbishop Leonid devoted the last part of his remarks to the persecution against Christians, giving special attention to their situation in Africa. He said, “Let us be honest before each other and find the courage to admit that in several African countries, while we keep silent, a real elimination of the Christian population is committed. In Nigeria, Congo, Burkina-Faso, Mozambique and other states, armed gangs of extremists purposefully and with impunity commit mass murders of Christians. The case in question is thousands of defenseless and innocent and harmless people”.

Archbishop Leonid also spoke about the discrimination of the clergy and faithful of the canonical Ukrainian Orthodox Church: “The rights of the faithful of the canonical Ukrainian Orthodox Church, the largest religious organization in Ukraine, cannot be ignored. Hundreds of her churches have been forcibly seized with the assistance of the authorities to be given over to the so-called “Orthodox Church of Ukraine” founded in 2018 by Petr Poroshenko and the Patriarch of Constantinople. Discrimination also takes place at the legal level, as criminals, who use violence against clergy and believers of the canonical Church, as a rule remain unpunished”.

The DECR vice-chairman also drew attention to the destiny of religious shrines in the world. “Imagine, with what a great pain does the defilement or destruction of a church echoes in the hearts of the faithful, or its demonstrative conversion for the needs of a different religion. Encroachment upon a shrine has the most pernicious impact on the interreligious dialogue, on peace and tranquility”, he stressed.

In the conclusion of his remarks, the archpastor reminded the forum that it is planned to hold a World Conference on Interreligious and Inter-ethnic Dialogue in May 2022 in St. Petersburg.

Among the speakers at the session were Hadji Dede Edmond Brahimaj, head of the Sufi community of the Albanian Bektashes; Monsignor Khaled Akasheh, head of the Bureau for Islam of the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue; Dr. Ibrahim an-Naimi, chairman of the Doha International Center for Interfaith Dialogue; Bishop Bertram Johannes Meier of Augsburg, who is chair of the sub-commission for interreligious dialogue of the Conference of German Catholic Bishops; and other representatives of interreligious organizations.

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Source: <https://mospat.ru/en/news/88015/>