



## **United Nations Humans Rights Council adopts the first ever statement in support of Christians in the Middle East**

On March 13, 2015, the UN Human Rights Council, on the sidelines of its Session XXVII adopted a statement 'Supporting the Human Rights of Christians and Other Communities, particularly in the Middle East' initiated by Russia, the Vatican and Lebanon.

The appearance of this statement has been dictated by the catastrophic situation of Christians in the Middle East who have been subjected to unprecedented persecution by the Islamic State and other terrorist groupings.

'The existence of many religious communities is seriously threatened. Christians are now especially affected. These days even their survival is in question', the Council points out.

The authors of the documents state, 'Millions of people have been either displaced or forced to leave their ancestral lands. Those who stay in conflict zones or areas controlled by terrorist groups live under the permanent threat of human rights violations, repression and abuses. Both communities and individuals fall victim to barbaric acts of violence: they are deprived of homes, driven from their native lands, sold into slavery, killed, beheaded and burnt alive. Dozens of Christian churches and ancient shrines of all religions have been destroyed'.

The countries who have adopted the statement call upon the international community 'to support the deeply rooted historical presence of all ethnic and religious communities in the Middle East' and 'to reaffirm their commitment to respect the rights of everyone, in particular the right to freedom of religion, which is enshrined in the fundamental international human rights instruments'.

For the first time in international discussions of so high a level, the problem of the persecution and discrimination of Christians in the Middle East has been voiced. The statement was signed by 65 countries. The adoption of this document was initiated by the Russian Federation.

An important role in drafting this document was played by the Russian Orthodox Church and the Imperial Orthodox Palestinian Society, who held on March 2, 2015, a high-level international conference on the Situation of Christians in the Middle East on the sidelines of the UN Human Rights Council session. Participating in its work was Archimandrite Philaret (Bulekov), vice-chairman of the Department

for External Church Relations.

On March 27, 2015, France as this month chair of the UN Security Council will initiate a special session for discussing the grievous situation of Christians in the Middle East.

*DECR Communication Service*

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Source: <https://mospat.ru/en/news/50577/>