

Joint Declaration by Patriarch Kirill of Moscow and all Russia and Justin, Archbishop of Canterbury, Primate of all England and Metropolitan

Who will separate us from the love of Christ? Will hardship, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril or sword? As it is written, 'For your sake we are being killed all day long; we are accounted as sheep to be slaughtered.' No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us.' (Romans 8. 35-37)

1. We, Patriarch of Moscow and All Russia Kirill and Justin, Archbishop of Canterbury, Primate of All England and Metropolitan, thank God for the opportunity to meet in Moscow in order to with one voice before the entire world bear witness to our brothers and sisters who are persecuted for faith in Christ. We cannot remain indifferent to the afflictions of our sisters and brothers, for 'if one member suffers, all suffer together with it: if one member is honoured, all rejoice together with it.' (1 Corinthians 12. 26).
2. In many countries of the Middle East and Africa there is persecution of Christians, manifested in mass killings, the barbaric destruction of churches, the desecration of holy sites and the expulsion of millions of people from their homes. Our hearts are pained by the mass exodus of the Christian population from those places where the Good News began to be spread throughout the world. Christians also suffer more subtle forms of discrimination where life is made so difficult that it is easier for them to leave their ancient homeland than to stay.
3. At the present moment the war has taken away tens of thousands of lives and left millions of people homeless and without the means for existence.
4. The necessity for retaining the Christian presence in the Middle East and the return of refugees requires guarantees of security, the restoration of the social infrastructure and living accommodation, the setting up of conditions for clergy to carry out their ministry and the restoration of destroyed churches.
5. We appeal to the international community to render speedy help to support the Christian and other populations of the Middle East. Wide-scale humanitarian aid is needed for those who are suffering and for the vast numbers of refugees, including those who have ended up in Europe and America. Scripture tells us that 'those who are kind reward themselves, but the cruel do themselves harm.' (Proverbs 11. 17)
6. The post-war rebuilding of Syria and Iraq is a topic of utmost importance for practical co-operation between Christians in the coming years. 'Bear one another's burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ,' says St Paul. (Galatians 6. 2)
7. We ought not to forget preventative measures against the ideology of extremism that has spread throughout the world under the influence of militants like an epidemic. We call upon the world's religious and political leaders to unite in their efforts to come up with an effective response to extremism. An important aspect of this co-operation is interreligious dialogue. Difference in doctrine ought not to serve as an obstacle to representatives of various religions living in peace and harmony, which are the pledge of a good future for the whole world.

8. In expressing solidarity with the Christians of the Middle East, we turn to them with the words of the apostle, 'we must always give thanks to God for you, brothers and sisters, as is right, because your faith is growing abundantly, and the love of every one of you for one another is increasing. Therefore we ourselves boast of you among the churches of God for your steadfastness and faith during all your persecutions and the afflictions that you are enduring.' (2 Thessalonians 1. 3-5)

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