

Sectarian Violence and the Plight of Christians in Libya, Palestine, Egypt and Syria: Moscow Patriarch

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Patriarch of Moscow and All Russia Kirill said he was concerned by the plight of Christian communities in the Middle East during a meeting with the Lebanese President Michel Sulayman on Monday.

“We see Christians fleeing Middle Eastern countries, and we consider it a threat to peace and security, especially a threat to inter-religious peace in Lebanon and other states,” the head of the Russian Orthodox Church said.

Lebanon has the largest percentage of Christians among all Middle Eastern nations, though no official figures have been available since the last census in 1926. Many Syrian Christians, who fled the ongoing civil conflict in the country, have settled in Lebanese border towns.

“I would like to assure you that the Russian Orthodox Church is ready to assist in solving the complicated issues that we have just discussed,” the patriarch said.

In the early 20th century, about 20 percent of the Middle East population were Christians, but the figure has now dwindled to around five percent.

According to Terry Waite, a Church of England envoy and a hostage negotiator in Lebanon, many Christians were forced to flee their homes after the Arab Spring, including in Syria, Egypt and Libya. The Christian population is also dwindling in the Palestinian Territories, while in Iraq over 300,000 Christians have fled persecution since the fall of Saddam Hussein’s regime.

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