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Catholics, Orthodox Unite in Defending Religious Freedom

Note That Christians Are Most Persecuted Group in the World

ROME, DEC. 15, 2011 ([Zenit.org](http://www.zenit.org)). A two-day conference held in Moscow ended with leaders from the Orthodox and Catholic Churches agreeing that they need to work to together to better help Christians that are persecuted.

The conference on "Religious freedom: the problem of discrimination and persecution of Christians," was hosted by the Russian Orthodox Patriarchate of Moscow, according to a report on it published Wednesday by Aid to the Church in Need.

"We Christians are all in the same boat. At times when Christians are suffering persecution, our solidarity is needed," commented Peter Humeniuk, who was there as a Russian expert from Aid to the Church in Need, which helped fund the conference.

The meeting took place shortly after a report from the Commission of the Bishops' Conferences of the European Community (COMECE) showed that at least 75% of all religious persecution is directed against Christians.

Among those present in Moscow were Archbishop Ivan Jurkovitch, apostolic nuncio to the Russian Federation, Archbishop Erwin Josef Ender, retired nuncio to Germany, and the archbishop of the Diocese of Mother of God at Moscow, Paolo Pezzi.

Getting the message

The need for action to protect Christians was also highlighted recently by Bishop Ricardo Ramirez of La Cruces, New Mexico. In his capacity as a member of the U.S. bishops' Committee on International Justice and Peace he gave testimony to the House Subcommittee on Africa, Global Health and Human Rights on Nov. 17.

Recent events, he said, clearly showed that religious freedom is under attack in many countries. He cited a Pew study, dated October 2010, which showed that Christians, more than any other group, suffer some form of harassment in 133 countries.

"An August 2011 follow-up Pew study found that restrictions on religion rose between 2006 and 2009 in some of the most populous countries, affecting about a third of the world's population," said Bishop Ramirez.

"It behooves leaders of all religions to work together to build a global culture of respect for religious freedom as a guarantor of human dignity and a contributor to justice," he told the committee members.

He also touched on the domestic front. "For our nation to have credibility in addressing religious freedom globally, we must continually work to protect religious freedom at home in the United States," he said.

Bishop Ramirez referred to testimony given in March by Cardinal Theodore McCarrick to the Senate Judiciary Committee. In it Cardinal McCarrick noted there were threats to the identity and integrity of Catholic social institutions as well as those of other traditions. Faith-based organizations need to be allowed to offer their services in a way that respects their religious traditions, the cardinal told the committee.

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On the Net:

Bishop Ramirez's address: http://www.usccb.org/about/international-justice-and-peace/upload/2011-11_USCCB_Religious_Freedom_Testimony.pdf