

RUSSIAN CHURCH RAISING AWARENESS ABOUT ATTACKS ON ETHIOPIAN CHRISTIANS



Attacks on churches, clergy, and the faithful of the Ethiopian Tewahedo church have significantly increased since August 2019 and cases of violence against Ethiopian Christians remain unpunished, says Hieromonk Stephen (Igumnov), Secretary for Inter-Christian Relations of the Moscow Patriarchate's Department for External Church Relations (DECR).

"The persecution of Ethiopian Christians belonging to the traditional church of this country occurs in certain regions and periodically affects the capital of Addis Ababa. The government of Ethiopia, headed by Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed Ali, is making significant efforts to resolve this situation, including responding to the request of the Russian Orthodox Church and Patriarch Kirill personally, who sent him a letter in December last year," Fr. Stephen explained to RIA-Novosti.

According to the DECR's information, the conflict is based on traditional inter-ethnic

clashes between the Oromo people and the Amhara and Tigray peoples, but interested parties are moving the conflict into the religious realm, with provocations that direct extremist actions against the Ethiopian church.

“These attacks haven’t stopped yet, and there has been no punishment for those responsible for the bloody massacres of Christians,” the hieromonk commented.

Certain forces are interested in destabilizing the situation in the country and are thus trying to undermine one of the main institutions of the Ethiopian state—the Ethiopian Tewahedo church, the DECR representative added.

“The target of attacks is clearly Christians and the Christian church. At the same time, the party that commits these attacks does not clearly identify itself on religious grounds,” Fr. Stephen said.

In this situation, it is very important to convey truthful information about the oppression of Christians in Ethiopia to the general world community, the Russian Church believes, so that the pogromists don’t have a sense of impunity.

In the fall of 2019, the attacks, including against churches and monasteries and the murder of priests and believer, sometimes during services, were centered in the province of Oromia, and spread out from there early this year. A brutal massacre was carried out at the construction site of one new church, with dozens killed and hundreds injured.

Since July, Ethiopia has been shaken by a series of protests following the high-profile murder of the popular singer and opposition leader, Khachalu Hundessa. Extremists have again targeted the faithful of the Tewahedo church, who are often beaten to death right on the street, Fr. Stephen lamented, adding that other denominations are not objects of attack.

Lastly, the DECR representative noted that there are Protestant preachers, backed by the United States, who are leading an aggressive mission among the traditional Christians of the Tewahedo church, claiming it is an alien denomination in Oromo, which is entirely untrue, Fr. Stephen emphasized.

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