

U.S. Secretary of Commerce troubled by persecution of Christians

Order of Saint Andrew the apostle, Archons of the Ecumenical Patriarchate in America (05.12.2017) – <http://bit.ly/2it8MpP> – “Violence arising from religious intolerance is a huge global problem,” U.S. Secretary of Commerce Wilbur Ross pointed out at the opening session of the three-day International Conference on Religious Freedom in the nation’s capital Monday night.

“The truth is that freedom of thought and belief are the underpinning of the most innovative and vibrant economies in human history – the United States among them,” Ross said. “That is at least partially why it is troubling to see a resurgence in the persecution of Christians in recent years.”

Ross spoke at the 3rd Archon International Conference on Religious Freedom. Sponsored by the Order of Saint Andrew the Apostle, Archons of the Ecumenical Patriarchate, the conference is a direct response to Pope Francis and Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew who expressed their “shared profound concern for the situation of Christians in the Middle East and for their right to remain full citizens of their homelands.”

Prior to his opening remarks at the Metropolitan Club, a press conference was held that featured several participants including His Eminence Archbishop Angaelos, Papal Legate for the United Kingdom for the Coptic Orthodox Church, who

stressed that the problem of the persecution of Christians is greater than many of us realize.

“It is time for us to stand and work together,” the archbishop, who was born in Egypt, emphasized. “It is an epidemic spreading through the world and it affects everyone. The brunt of this persecution falls on Christians.”

Also at the press conference was Archbishop Dionysius John Kawak, Archbishop and Patriarchal Vicar, Syriac Orthodox Archdiocese of the Eastern United States, who stressed the importance to find a solution, noting that 50 percent of the Syrian Christians have left that country.

“Our goal as Middle East Christians is to teach everyone to accept one another,” he said, emphasizing the need to stop the war, adding that we must “collaborate to help those that need the most help.”

Also at the press conference was Johny (cq) Messo, president of the World Council of Arameans (Syriacs), who said this conference “gives us the opportunity to speak for people who have no voice,” adding that “if you look at Syria and Iraq today we have to hope the situation can be stabilized since very few Christians are left. It is very important to act now – not tomorrow.”

Also participating at the press conference was Elizabeth Prodromou, Tufts University Fletcher School for Law and Diplomacy visiting professor of conflict resolution, saying

what happens in the Middle East is important because all people have the right to be free, stressing that Christians are being targeted.

Speaking about the conference, His Eminence Archbishop Demetrios of America remarked, "This conference provides the context for intensifying our prayers to God for the safety and well being of all Christians confronted by forces of hatred, religious intolerance and wild fanaticism."

"Christianity is being wiped out from the very lands in which it was born 2,000 years ago," said Dr. Anthony Limberakis, National Commander for the Order of St. Andrew. "By hosting the Third International Conference on Religious Freedom, the Order of St. Andrew aims to shed light on this crisis confronting Christians in the Middle East."

The conference continues Tuesday with a breakfast meeting featuring Hank Hanegraaff, Christian Research Institute president, as speaker, followed by sessions on the "History of the Christian Church" focusing on the disappearance of Christians from Christianity's birthplace and a luncheon address by Sen. Ben Cardin, D-Md., ranking member of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee. An afternoon session will focus on "Persecution of Christians and Possible Solutions" followed by an evening session featuring Jordan Sekulow, executive director of the American Center for Law and Justice.

On Wednesday the schedule will include speakers Sen. Marco Rubio, R-Fl., Jay Alan Sekulow, chief counsel for the American Center for Law and Justice and the European Centre for Law and

Justice, a session on “Freedoms of Religion and the Press” and on “Sacred Sites and Property Rights.”

Open Doors USA, the California-based non-profit that has tracked Christian persecution for the past 25 years, points out that millions of Christians face interrogation, arrest, torture, and/or death because of their religious convictions and cultural or ethnic identification. The U.S. State Department reports that Christians face persecution in more than 60 countries with Pew Research noting that between 2007 and 2014, Christians have been targeted for harassment in more countries than any other religious group.

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Conference: <https://www.facebook.com/OrderStAndrew/videos/10155899280654322/>

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PAKISTAN: Cousin of Nobel laureate Abdus Salam gunned down in Nankana Sahib

By Saad Sayeed

Reuters (30.03.2017) – <http://reut.rs/2n0dNew> – A prominent member of Pakistan's minority Ahmadi community and relative of its first Nobel Prize winner was gunned down on Thursday in an attack claimed by banned militant group Lashkar-e-Jhangvi.

Malik Saleem Latif, a cousin of Abdus Salam, who shared the physics prize in 1979, was shot just yards from his home in the town of Nankana, near Lahore in the southern province of Punjab, said Saleemuddin, a spokesman for the Ahmadi community.

Latif was riding his motor-bike to work with his son when a gunman opened fire, said Saleemuddin, who goes by only one name.

"Threats against Ahmadis are common in the area and Latif was a prominent member of the community and a well-known lawyer," he added.

The Ahmadi community has been a target of mob violence and attacks since the government legislated the sect as non-Muslim in 1974.

"Saleem Latif was spreading Ahmadi beliefs in the region," the militant group, Lashkar-e-Jhangvi, said in a statement claiming Thursday's attack.

It was the latest in a series of sectarian incidents in Pakistan, where security forces have battled groups like Lashkar-e-Jhangvi for years.

“We have three teams investigating and searching for the assailants and trying to apprehend them,” district police officer Shahzada Billa Umer told Reuters.

Ahmadis are not allowed to call themselves Muslim or use Islamic symbols in their religious practices, a crime punishable under Pakistan’s blasphemy laws.

The laws also make propagation of Ahmadi beliefs an offence, with 494 Ahmadis accused in 1,335 such cases over the past 30 years, rights body Amnesty International has said in a report.

Salam, who was Pakistan’s only Nobel laureate until Malala Yousufzai shared the peace prize in 2014, remains a contentious figure because of his religious background.

Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif’s government recently named a university physics department after Salam, drawing condemnation from the religious right, including the state funded Council of Islamic Ideology.

In 2010, two simultaneous attacks on Ahmadi mosques in Lahore by the Pakistani Taliban killed 94 people. Three days later, militants stormed the hospital where survivors were taken, killing 12 people, mostly police and hospital staff.

Salam, who died in 1996, shared the Nobel Prize with Sheldon Glashow and Steven Weinberg for helping to pave the way to the discovery of the “God particle,” one of science’s greatest achievements in the last 100 years.

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