

Petersburg

The grand imam: “Interreligious dialogue is not enough to stop terrorism.” In Moscow, the Morning Prayer led by patriarch Kirill for the victims (14 at last count)



A woman lays flowers at St. Petersburg underground station

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The University of Al Azhar, the main theological and academic center of Sunni Islam, has immediately condemned the terrorist attack that hit St. Petersburg’s subway system yesterday, Monday, April 3. In a statement released a few hours after the attack - and reported by the agency Fides - al Azhar expressed the urgent need to fight terrorism with appropriate international measures to curb the flow of arms and resources directed to the apparatus of terror.

Not even two days ago, Sheikh Ahmed al-Tayyib, the Grand Imam of Al Azhar, had expressed the same urges during a meeting with a delegation led by Peter Thompson, current President of the General Assembly of the United Nations. On that occasion, the Sheikh had also acknowledged that interreligious dialogue is not itself enough to counter the spread of terrorism, if not accompanied by comprehensive policies based on the principle of justice, and the will to put exploitation of the poorest to an end. Al Tayyib - who will speak with the Pope at the International Conference on Peace, during Francis’ journey in Egypt of April 29 to 29 - has also claimed the efforts made in recent years by Al-Azhar to consolidate dialogue with many Churches and Christian institutions, starting from the Catholic Church.

Meanwhile, this morning, the Patriarch of Moscow and All Russia, Kirill, presided over the celebration of a “litany”, a memorial service for the victims of the explosion that - at last count - amount to 14, along with dozens of injured. The liturgy was held in the cathedral of the Transfiguration of Christ the Savior, in Moscow, before the meeting of the Supreme Council of the Russian Orthodox Church. This “bold crime has no justification”, wrote yesterday evening Patriarch Kirill in a message of condolence to the Governor of St. Petersburg, Georgy Poltavchenko, and the Metropolitan Varsonofio. “The Russian Orthodox Church strongly condemns the aggressive action against civilians and calls on the society to oppose all manifestations of violence,” it is written in the message, which also stresses on the Orthodox Church’s three days of mourning.

The attack occurred yesterday at about 2.40 pm local time, in a subway wagon traveling between two stops “Tekhnologicheskii Institut” and “Sennaya Ploshad” on the blue line of the St. Petersburg underground system. The latter was filled with so much smoke after the violent explosion, that it was thought at first of two explosions. A little later a second bomb,

rudimentary, was actually found unexploded in a third station “Ploshchad Vosstaniya”, near Revolution Square.

Being clear the terrorist nature of the attack, the bomb squad initially declared that the bomb had been placed in one of the convoys before its departure. Afterwards, more detailed investigations on the dynamics of the massacre emerged instead that it was a suicide bomber riding the wagon, to blow himself up through an explosive vest. The device was made even deadlier by adding “harmful elements”, such as glass, nails and other pieces of iron. Currently investigations are focusing on “a 23 year-old native of Central Asia.”

Today’s Arab press described the attack in St. Petersburg as a “revenge” of the Islamic State against Russia’s support to the regime in Damascus. Back in September 2015, Isis had invited his men to hit Russia; as reported by several Arabic newspapers there are 7 thousand fighters from former USSR republics who have joined the jihadists. Among these 2,900 are Russians.