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Russia's Patriarch Kirill Slams Charlie Hebdo's Mockery of Christians

By The Moscow Times

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Russian Prime Minister Dmitry Medvedev (6th L) and his wife Svetlana (7th L) attend an Orthodox Christmas service, with Patriarch of Moscow and All Russia Kirill seen in the foreground. Jan. 7, 2015.

The head of Russia's influential Orthodox Church, Patriarch Kirill, has said cartoons of the Prophet Muhammad in the French satirical magazine Charlie Hebdo were "childish" compared to offenses it had dished out to Christians.

Charlie Hebdo has regularly offended Muslims, Christians and others with its irreverent cartoons.

Gunmen killed 12 people at the Paris office of the weekly this month saying they were avenging the Prophet Muhammad, whom the magazine had depicted in cartoons in defiance of a ban in Islam on representing its founder.

Kirill, who has close ties to Russian President Vladimir Putin, said in a sermon that he

opposed both terrorism and giving offense to religious feelings.

"The cartoons of Prophet Muhammad are childish caricatures compared to what this publication allows itself in mocking the feelings of Christians," Kirill said in an excerpt of the sermon broadcast Sunday by Rossiya 24 state television.

"Today, in saying 'no' to terrorism, killings, violence, we also say 'no' to the inexplicable drive by a certain group of people to deride religious feelings," he said.

Russia is a multi-ethnic, multi-confessional country, with a large Muslim minority, but Putin has increasingly promoted the Russian Orthodox Church as the carrier of ethical values indispensable for the nation.

Putin, who is at loggerheads with Western countries over the Ukraine crisis, did not join dozens of other world leaders who led more than one million people in a Paris march in support of Charlie Hebdo and the right to freedom of expression.

More protests, both in support of the magazine as well as against it, followed in Europe, the Middle East and North Africa.

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