Statement of the Holy Synod of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church on the situation in Ukrainian and World Orthodoxy

The Holy Synod of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church at its session held on April 3, 2019, discussed the situation in the Ukrainian church life and in world Orthodoxy that has come about after the anticanonical granting of the "Tomos of Autocephaly" to the newly created "Orthodox Church of Ukraine", and hereby declares the following:

1. We state that the idea of overcoming the church schism in Ukraine by the granting of the Tomos of autocephaly to the uncanonical church groups ("UOC-KP" and "UAOC") has turned out to be an error. None of the Local Orthodox Churches has recognized this illegal act perpetrated by the Patriarchate of Constantinople while a large part of the Local Churches, including the Churches of Antioch, Russia, Serbia, Cyprus, Albania, Poland and Orthodox Church of the Czech Lands and Slovakia, have already expressed in various forms their disagreement with the decisions made by the Patriarchate of Constantinople. The Local Churches have also stated that they did not recognize the newly created "Orthodox Church of Ukraine" as well as consecrations performed in this structure and prohibit their clergy to have any prayerful contacts and liturgical concelebration with its representatives in any form whatsoever. Thus, there was no reception, in other words acceptance, by world Orthodoxy of the actions perpetrated by the Patriarchate of Constantinople; which, in fact, has attempted to legalise the schism. Indeed, the legalization of the schism is not a way along which church unity can be achieved. We remind you that according to the historical-canonical tradition of the Church, autocephaly is granted only to a one Church within a certain state, and not to any part that has broken off from the Body of the Church.
2. It must be admitted that the historical and canonical arguments presented by the Patriarchate of Constantinople regarding its own right and the possibility of interfering in the affairs of other Local Churches are unfounded, artificial, far-fetched and run contrary to the church canons. The Patriarchate of Constantinople did not have any right whatsoever to interfere in the church life of Ukraine. The actions and arguments of the Patriarchate of Constantinople, which illegally lifted the anathema from the chief culprit of the Ukrainian church schism, Filaret Denisenko, and recognised the hierarchy of the "UAOC", which does not have apostolic succession at all, testifies to the fact that Phanar does not fully comprehend the true essence of what is happening in the Orthodox midst of Ukraine. In fact, Filaret Denisenko was not anathematized for seeking autocephaly, as the Patriarchate of Constantinople states, but for his immoral personal life, the unrepented sin of creating a schism in the Church and establishing a parallel schismatic hierarchy and a quasi-church structure, which throughout its existence stood in opposition to the canonical Ukrainian Orthodox Church and continues struggle against it under another name and even threatens to destroy the unity among the Local Orthodox Churches.
3. It should be noted that the actions of the Patriarchate of Constantinople in Ukraine have caused great harm to Ukrainian Orthodoxy and have become a threat to Pan-Orthodox unity. We believe that the Patriarchate of Constantinople and Patriarch Bartholomew personally must avow their mistake and start working on correcting it. The means of rectifying their mistake could be the revocation of the Tomos, call for the schismatics to repent their sin of schism and convocation of

the Pan-Orthodox meeting for taking a conciliar resolution of the Ukrainian church question.

4. Church reality in Ukraine shows that the Tomos has brought to Orthodox Christians neither unity, nor peace or calm as was promised by the initiators of this idea from the church and state circles a year ago. Instead, violence, conflicts, confrontation, tears and suffering of the faithful of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church have become fruits of the Tomos. All these facts testify that the simple legalization of schism does not change the schismatics who remain aggressive and hostile to the Church. Only repentance and sincere recognition of their mistakes before the Church and their return to her bosom can bring peace and unity in the church life of Ukraine.
5. Violence, discrimination and violation of the rights of the faithful of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church have already been noticed by international human rights organizations. In particular, this was reflected in the latest report of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights. These offenses, often supported by local authorities, compromise our country in the world. Violence, the seizure of our churches and other unlawful acts will not lead to church unity in Ukraine. This is a false path and one needs to have courage to recognize this mistake. We respectfully request representatives of the authorities in power to put an end to the artificial initiative on changing the jurisdiction of our parishes, since our clergy and parishioners do not wish it. We believe that the campaign to discredit the Ukrainian Orthodox Church, the prohibition of the presence of the clergy of our Church in the army, attempts to forcibly change the name of our Church and other similar anti-church actions are a strategic mistake of the authorities as far as domestic policy and stability in the state are concerned.
6. Of particular concern is the fact of criminal prosecution of Archpriest Viktor Zemlyanoy, a cleric of the Rovno diocese of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church. For the first time in the years of Ukraine's independence, a priest who defends the rights of believers and freedom of religion is prosecuted without reason and accused of incitement to religious hatred.
7. We ask the state authorities not to interfere in church affairs, not to contribute to the incitement to religious hatred through their actions and to cancel the requirements of the Law of Ukraine No. 2673-VIII of 17 January 2019 on the renaming of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church as being unconstitutional and contrary to the standards of the Ukrainian and international law and basic principles of human rights and freedoms. We also appeal to the government not to facilitate illegal seizure of our Church's parishes through their illegal re-registration. The Lord gives power to the rulers not for engendering discord in society, but for the preservation of peace, tranquility and harmony among all citizens of the country.
8. We address representatives of the newly created structure – the "Orthodox Church of Ukraine" with an appeal to recall the words of Christ that love for our neighbour is a sign of true Christians (*cf.* John 13:35). The more violence on your part against our believers today, the more distant will be the prospect of restoring church unity in Ukraine. The fact that you seize our churches, involving political, state and sometimes even paramilitary structures and throw our communities into street, forcing them to pray in the open air or in ill-fitted premises; we perceive with Christian patience. "When reviled, we bless; when persecuted, we endure; when slandered, we speak kindly" (1 Cor. 4:12-13). In this patience we humbly pray and await the time when Christian love will overcome hatred, malice and hostility and we will be able to meet you on the threshold of the Church and embrace you as brothers and sisters who have returned home.
9. We express our gratitude to those Local Orthodox Churches, which have already supported the canonical church order and have not agreed with legalization of the schism. We also thank those priests and laypersons who had lost their churches that were seized and have remained loyal to the Church. We call upon the clergy and laity of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church to help and support the priests and communities whose churches were forcibly seized, bearing in mind the words of St. Paul: "Bear one another's burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ" (Gal. 6:2).
10. During these salvific days of the holy season of Lent, as we have already passed the half way to the great feast of the Bright Resurrection of Christ, we ask everyone to pray to the Lord to

preserve the unity of Holy Orthodoxy, strengthen us in our steadfast standing for the Truth of God, and grant peace, tranquility and mutual understanding to our Ukrainian State and bless all of us.

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