His Holiness Patriarch Kirill delivers address at a meeting of the Supreme Church Council on 26 December 2018

On 26 December 2018, the Supreme Church Council of the Russian Orthodox Church held a regular session in the Hall of the Supreme Church Council of the Cathedral of Christ the Saviour in Moscow under the chairmanship of His Holiness Patriarch Kirill of Moscow and All Russia. His Holiness delivered an opening address.

I greet all the members of the Supreme Church Council at this year's last session. Of course, we will discuss the results of the year, but first of all, I would like to cordially greet all of you. And I have to say a few words about the year gone by, which, as we all feel, was very difficult.

The situation of our Church in Ukraine is still a source of great tension, a factor affecting the well-being of Orthodox Christians, their spiritual welfare. You are well informed, you know what is going on, what developments – radical, extremely dangerous for the integrity of the Ukrainian people, and not only for our Church – have recently taken place in Kiev following the decision of the Ukrainian parliament requiring to change the name of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church. These changes will be followed by repressions, and it is completely obvious that an ultimatum has been presented: if the Church does not change its name, its registration will be cancelled. And if the Church changes its name, then, naturally, an enormous pressure will be exerted on the Ukrainian people, on the public. There is no doubt that acts of violence will be committed to take away church buildings. People in Ukraine are believers, they are Orthodox Christians, firm in faith and emotional, hence there is a risk that the situation concerning the church buildings can escalate into bloody conflicts. Therefore, I ask you to pray even more zealously for peace in the brotherly Ukrainian land and for the preservation of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church.

As is widely known, what triggered persecutions of the Ukrainian Orthodoxy was the unprecedented decision of Constantinople, going beyond the bounds of any canonical order and therefore criminal, to encroach on the canonical territory of the Ukrainian Church of the Moscow Patriarchate, on the territory of our Church. This encroachment resulted in and was followed by the devastating developments, first of all, the interference of the governmental authorities, also unprecedented. And it occurred in the country which declares its commitment to the European values, one of which is the separation of the Church, of religion, from the state! In violation of this fundamental European value the state in the person of president directly interferes in church administration, one may say, presides at what is called "unification church council" and participates in negotiations with Constantinople on the so-called "tomos," doing all

this in front of TV cameras, in plain view of the whole world.

Speaking on TV recently, I asked a question: how would the world react if the president of the Russian Federation presided at the Local Council of the Russian Orthodox Church or presented some hierarch to the whole world and to the public on behalf of the Council? One can imagine what the reaction all over the world would be! While in this situation there is silence, complete and overarching – it means that one may violate the fundamental rights and laws, if it helps achieve a concrete political goal. This concrete political goal was very well formulated by, among others, plenipotentiary representatives of the United States who are working in Ukraine, as well by representatives of the Ukrainian authorities – it is necessary to break the last bond between our peoples, that is, the spiritual bond.

We are eyewitnessing a civilizational catastrophe. It is unprecedented. There has never been such grossest, open interference in church affairs – perhaps, with the exception of the periods of direct persecutions that our Church was also subjected to. That is why the developments taking place in the Ukrainian land today sadden our soul, but, on the other hand, call us all to even more fervent prayer. I ask all of you, brethren, and the clergy subordinate to you, to pray in church and at home for His Beatitude Metropolitan Onufry and for the episcopate of our Church which by the mercy of God stands firm on the canonical principles.

As you know, one of Constantinople's motives for the direct interference in the Ukrainian affairs, in violation of all existing canonical rules, was its conviction that the organization of the "unification council" and the legalization of the schismatics would bring about the collapse of all the Ukrainian Orthodox Church. It was believed that as soon as Constantinople would begin this process and legalize the schismatics, hierarchs of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church would rush to the "unification council." This idea really besotted Patriarch Bartholomew. He was persuaded that as soon as this happened, the Orthodox hierarchs of the Ukrainian Church, one by one, would go to the council, that they only needed a stimulus, that they were ready. False information was given about dozens of hierarchs who allegedly had already supported the "unification council." During my meeting with Patriarch Bartholomew he gave me a hint, saying, "A considerable part of your episcopate supports the council." I answered that it was a lie, that, according to the data available to me, these were two or three people, and I characterized their personalities. It had no effect on him, but everything happened as I had said – there were not even three, but two hierarchs – those whom I meant. The "unification council" totally failed – there was no unification, but only a merger between schismatics, their unlawful, anti-canonical legalization by the Patriarch whose jurisdiction did not and could not spread over the Ukrainian land.

Constantinople's actions are astonishing even according to common sense. How could Constantinople declare Patriarch Dionysius's Letter of 1686 null and void? What church or secular leaders in their right mind can declare that some historical act that is 300 years old gets revoked? In one of his works

Aristotle cites Agathon, a tragic poet who lived in the 5th century BC. Speaking about pagan gods, he expressed a very interesting thought which Constantinople should be familiarized with. The thought is such: “One thing only is impossible to God: to make undone that which has been done.” What was done is beyond control for anyone, even God. And the year 1686 is the reality, stemming from which is the entire history. Can anyone imagine that Great Britain revokes the Indian Independence Act? Let us suppose that some crazy ruler decides to revoke it – will India disappear? Will the state, its economics, social relations and culture disappear? And what if it will occur to somebody in Great Britain to abolish the fact of existence of the United States? What if they say that it is wrong that there was a liberation war there and that an independent state was established, what if they say that over two hundred years have been annulled – what will change? Everybody will only laugh. And it had to happen that they ventured to make such a caricature of the history! Indeed, this is a caricature, but they ventured it! Here is both tragedy and comedy, for it seems impossible to give a rational assessment to everything that Constantinople has done.

Naturally, our retaliatory actions followed. We broke off the communion. The Church has no way to stop a schism other than to shield itself from the schism. Therefore, the decision to break off the Eucharistic communion is the decision to save the integrity of the Orthodox Church, it is a wish to shield ourselves from the schism, from its pernicious influence. We took this decision to preserve our integrity. The Church has no other means. And when they say to us, “Are you not too…,” it is a question of what people think of the role of canon law in ecclesiastical life, but for the Church there are no other ways. I would like to wholeheartedly thank our hierarchs for actively supporting this decision of our Church’s Holy Synod. As you know, now in metropolias various kinds of spontaneous gatherings are taking place – assemblies of bishops, councils in metropolias and diocesan councils – to discuss the decision taken by the Church. We have great support from the episcopate, clergy and laity.

I am speaking of sorrows, but, as a wise man said, this too shall pass. The church organization, that is being established in such a way in Ukraine today, is absolutely unviable. Secular people cannot realize that, but church people are well aware of that. We, in the Russian Orthodox Church, understand it particularly well, because what occurred in the post-revolutionary years, is happening, literally in the same way, in Ukraine today. The situation in Ukraine mirrors the politics of the revolutionary authorities in the Soviet Union, aimed at destroying the Russian Orthodox Church. Back then the authorities instigated the Renovationist schism. The creation of the schism was a monstrously hazardous scheme planned by the secular authorities. However, among those who were implementing the schism instigated from outside were church people, and not only priests, but also bishops. Very many hierarchs endorsed the idea of the Renovationist schism. Patriarch Tikhon found himself in isolation, alone in some sense, and at that moment Constantinople legalized the schismatics! The Patriarch of Constantinople appealed to His Holiness Patriarch Tikhon, demanding him to leave and give power to the “supreme church administration.” All the real political efforts of the Patriarchate of Constantinople

channeled through its permanent representation in Moscow were aimed, as you know, at supporting the schismatics and fighting against the canonical Church. And what lofty goals Constantinople pursued – to get an opportunity to use several real property assets and gain commercial benefit – a clear reflection of what is going on in Ukraine now with regard to the establishment of the stavropegia.

We went through that; we know that it was a great ordeal. Yet, the Church of God triumphed after all. That is why, looking at what happened and is happening in Ukraine through the lens of our own experience, we can say that this story will have the same end as the story of the Renovationism in the Soviet Union, because the healthy blessed strength of the Church, the might of God prevail over human power, no matter how enormous it is. It is in the Church that the Lord is present and the Holy Spirit abides. And I thank the Orthodox people of Ukraine, the clergy and bishops who have rallied round His Beatitude Metropolitan Onufry. No doubt, this unity is a pledge that evil forces will fail to destroy the blessed body of the Orthodox Church in Ukraine.

As you know, a bill on the change of the Church's name has been adopted. This bill is nonsensical in terms of contemporary legislation and principles guiding the state's relationships with religious organizations. In all Western countries, in secular countries on which Ukraine models itself, the name of a religious organization has nothing to do with the state, it only concerns the religious organization. Such is the principle. It is only important that there are no repetitions, so that there would be no confusion in who is represented by this or that legal entity. All the rest concerns the religious organization. As you know, I used to work at the World Council of Churches. From time to time an issue would arise as to the names of the religious organizations that joined or wanted to join the World Council of Churches. The solution was easy: the name that the religious organization used became its name in the World Council of Churches. It is an ordinary principle, nothing new. Yet, when a state makes up a name for a religious organization, doing it with a clear wish to discriminate and eventually destroy it, then it is a violation of all the rights and laws established in a civilized society.

It should be noted once again that if, as we see, there are commands, including that coming from outside, to destroy the Orthodox Church in Ukraine, then, in order to implement this plan of destruction, no holds barred. And the fact that the world today keeps silent proves it. As for us, we should learn from it, learn that these were fairytales that they tried to impose on us for many years, telling about the rule of law, human rights, religious freedom and everything that until recently was considered to be a fundamental value in the formation of state and human relations in today's society.

What is going on in Ukraine today will, undoubtedly, have very dangerous consequences for the lives of many countries. The current situation in Ukraine can be used as a precedent. It means that all the factors that helped maintain the interfaith peace, religious freedom and human rights will no longer be inviolable, especially if all these values will hinder somebody from accomplishing their political tasks.

What has occurred is very hazardous not only for Ukraine, but for the whole world, because Ukraine can become a precedent, an example of how easy it is to deal with any laws, any rules, any human rights, if those in power need it.

In response to all this I would like to say once again that we call upon everyone to pray, to work together and to support the Ukrainian Orthodox Church. We pray that the Lord may preserve the blessed Ukrainian Orthodox Church and bring people to reason, that people may be able to separate politics from faith, and, most importantly, that nobody may have any doubts that it is in the Ukrainian Orthodox Church that the Holy Spirit is abiding, the Sacraments are being performed and people are being saved. For the sake of all this, for the sake of God's presence in human history, for the sake of the Holy Spirit acting through the Church in people, the Church suffers humiliation and persecutions from time to time. However, the history shows that the end is always the same, that the Church emerges as victor from all these temptations, not because it is strong, but because the Holy Spirit abides and acts in it. Therefore, I once again call upon you to offer your prayers and remember what is going on in the brotherly Ukraine.

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