Legal Department of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church comments on the adoption of discriminatory bill No. 5309 by Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine

On 20 December 2018, the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine adopted the bill No. 5309 “On Amendments to the Law of Ukraine ‘On Freedom of Conscience and Religious Organisations’ regarding the names of religious organisations (associations) that are part of the structure (are members) of a religious organisation (association) whose governing centre (administration) is located outside Ukraine in a state, which is recognised by the law as having committed military aggression against Ukraine and/or temporarily having occupied part of the territory of Ukraine.”

The Legal Department of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church issued a statement concerning the adoption of the bill No. 5309, emphasising that it “violates the right to the freedom of religion and discriminates on religious grounds millions of faithful citizens of Ukraine who belong to the Ukrainian Orthodox Church, as well as contradicts the Constitution of Ukraine, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms.”

“Ukraine is a secular state, what makes it impossible to establish at a legislative level any preferences or restrictions with regard to this or that religious association,” the document says, “Forcing the Ukrainian Orthodox Church to change its name is nothing but interference in its activities, which can lead to unpredictable consequences in society.”

Although no specific religious organisation is mentioned in the bill, it has become known from some public statements that there is an intention to apply it to the Ukrainian Orthodox Church in order to please the newly established religious association “Orthodox church of Ukraine” that wants to take this name. “Once again we emphasise that the Ukrainian Orthodox Church is the Church of the Ukrainian people, that it was founded by the Council of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church and registered in compliance with the Ukrainian legislation, and its centre is located in Kiev,” the statement reads.

“We regard this bill as anti-constitutional and intend to defend our rights by all legitimate means. We appeal to the President of Ukraine, asking him to use his veto power against this bill,” the Legal Department of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church states.

DECR Communication Service

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