THE RUSSIAN ORTHODOX CHURCH
Department for External Church Relations

Primate of the Orthodox Church of Alexandria underscores the anti-church nature of bills Nos 4128 and 4511 to be considered by Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine

His Beatitude Patriarch Theodore II of Alexandria and All Africa sent a letter to His Holiness Patriarch Kirill of Moscow and All Russia in connection with the upcoming consideration by the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine of bills targeting the Ukrainian Orthodox Church. His Beatitude believes that the proposed changes in legislation trample upon human rights and stand in the way of freedom of religion.

The letter was sent in reply to the letter of His Holiness Patriarch Kirill of 17 May 2017 to the heads of the Normandy Four states, Primates of the Local Orthodox Churches , Pope Francis, UN Secretary-General and General Secretary of the World Council of Churches.

His Beatitude Patriarch Theodore II sent a copy of his letter to the head of the Roman Catholic Church, representatives of the European and international organizations and the President of Ukraine. The text reads as follows:

We have read the letter of Your Holiness No 01/2607 of May 17, 2017, informing us of the actions and legislative initiatives of the Ukrainian government directed against the Ukrainian Orthodox Church.

It is known that since the time when the national states have appeared and the national movement at our Orthodox East has begun to develop, the Orthodox Church used to be “a bone of contention” among the states, and certain political circles were trying to manipulate it for political and state reasons inflicting suffering to the Orthodox Church and making her alien to her mission.

We live now in a new epoch for all religious communities which can solve their problems without outside interference thanks to the ensuring of the main freedoms at the international level, for instance, in Europe, including the highest good – freedom of religion.

We believe that such violent interference of the state into the affairs of the Orthodox Church is unthinkable as it creates insuperable obstacles and damage interreligious accord.

This action of the Ukrainian government which tries to manipulate the Orthodox Church and subject her to the state and political interests is a gross violation of the long-established and enshrined in law

principle of freedom of religion. Also, this action runs contrary to the European Convention on Human Rights and violates its provisions. The state cannot arbitrarily adopt law on the Church without participation of the Church in the country which claims its respect for European values and does its utmost to be closely connected with the major European institutions.

The leadership of Ukraine must take a neutral stand rather than go on a leash of the irresponsible nationalistic circles. This behavior is unbecoming of the genuine European state.

This inadmissible fact of the influence and interference of the state into the internal affairs of the Orthodox communities undermines the principle of peaceful coexistence of Orthodox Christians in Ukraine and is bringing about a religious conflict which can poison the principles of peaceful coexistence and reduce them to zero.

By its actions the Ukrainian government distorts the tradition of the Orthodox Church in Ukraine and promotes suspicion, hatred and enmity among members of the Orthodox Church, thus distancing itself from the guiding principle of the solution of problems – the dialogue, which has been always conducive to the solution of long accumulated problems of Orthodoxy in Ukraine.

I clearly and decisively state that we personally and the entire Church of Alexandria are wholeheartedly with You and the Moscow Patriarchate and the Ukrainian Orthodox Church in the struggle for the upholding of inviolable privileges of the Orthodox communities in Ukraine. We always stand for the indisputable principle of freedom of religion without any interference of the state.

We denounce legislative changes intended by the Ukrainian state as inadmissible, as trampling upon human rights and hindering freedom of religion, and as the inexcusable interference of the secular state into internal affairs of the Orthodox Church.

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