Representatives of captured churches of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church appeal to country leaders



On February 22, 2021, participants in the congress of representatives of captured churches of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church adopted an appeal to Ukrainian statesmen - President V. A. Zelensky, Prime Minister D. A. Shmygal, Chairman of the Supreme Rada D. A. Razumkov and deputies of this legislative body.

The appeals state in particular,

“We, participants in the congress of representatives of the captured parishes of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church (hereafter UOC), appeal to you to defend the greatest value - our life, our health and security as well as those of our families.

We appeal to you on behalf of those faithful of our Church who have suffered a severe bodily harm such as punches in heads, broken arms, beating. We also appeal to you on behalf of many clergy who are continuously and groundlessly summoned for interrogation at law-enforcement bodies and humiliated in every way.

We appeal to you on behalf of the family of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church’s priest Leonid Delikatny, whose health has been irreparably undermined by continuous threats, blackmail and psychological

pressure in attempts to transfer forcibly the community he leads to a different confession.

We appeal to you on behalf of Kristina Velushchak, a young woman from the Chernovtsy Region, who was barred from her own school graduation party because of attending 'a wrong Church', as well as other UOC parishioners suffering from restrictions of their civil rights because of their faith.

We also appeal to you on behalf of large families of the UOC priests who have been driven out of their homes into streets thus making small children homeless.

We appeal to you on behalf of ordinary people from all parts of Ukraine who forcibly or deceivingly (through illegitimate re-registration of parish statutes by regional state administrations) have been deprived or subjected to attempts to deprive them of their churches to which their grandfathers and great-grandfathers used to come.

We point out that as the largest religious community in Ukraine we, unfortunately, are losing hope that our rights to freedom of faith will be ensured by the state power bodies and their leaders. The law in force, which should regulate religious legal relationships in a state, quite the contrary, reinforces the split in society, divide people into ones' own and others', which leads to a growing number of inter-confessional confrontations and aggravation of religious enmity and conflicts in the state - thus, the 17.01.2019 Ukrainian Law No. 2673-VIII 'On the Amendments to Certain Laws of Ukraine Concerning Subordination of Religious Organizations and Procedure for State Registration of Religious Organizations with Status of Legal Entity' and the 20.12.2018 Ukrainian Law No. 2662-VIII 'On the Amendments to Article 12 of the Ukrainian Law On Freedom of Conscience and Religious Organizations' concerning the designation of religious organizations (associations), included in the structure (are parts) of a religious organization (association) whose center (administration) is located outside Ukraine in a state recognized by law as that which carried out an aggression against Ukraine and/or has temporarily occupied a part of the territory of Ukraine - the laws that gravely violate the constitutional principle of the separation of state from church.
We express our profound concern for that fact that in recent years the Ukrainian Minister of Culture by way of abuse and manipulation has used these anti-constitutional laws exclusively against the Ukrainian Orthodox Church and coercively sought to deprive her if her own name. Officials have violated the principle of equality of all religious confessions and restricted the rights of one religious organization among others, which is discrimination on religious grounds of millions of believers who belong to the Ukrainian Orthodox Church. The state bodies, by interfering in the internal affairs of the Church, have imposed their own understanding of her religious and hierarchal structure. There are violations of the Ukrainian Constitution provisions that exclude the possibility for establishing special requirements for designating particular religious organizations and regulate the right of each to profess any religion. That is why, the UOC religious communities are subject to continuous pressure coming from state authorities and raiders; we have been deprived of the possibility to introduce amendments to the constituent documents, to use notary services, to register officially the rights to plots of land under church buildings, etc.

Some pseudo-religious organizations have regularly carried out provocative actions causing destabilization in Ukrainian society. In the mass media and internet space, false information is given about religious events, which discredit the Ukrainian Orthodox Church. There are an increased number of criminal offences committed on religious grounds and litigations for appealing the acts of state authorities, etc. The use of anti-constitutional laws by church raiders leads to the deterioration of the level of freedom of faith in Ukraine, to the creation of considerable obstacles for the religious and social service of churches and religious organizations.

The law on the coercive change of the designation and subordination is not correspondent with either

the Ukrainian Constitution or international agreements on human rights. In particular, the norms of laws contradict provisions of the Convention on Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms, the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights with regard to the protection of the right to freedom of faith.

The UOC religious communities have found themselves in an unequal situation as compared to other religious organizations in Ukraine. The forceful re-registration, the change in the name of religious organizations (associations) and subordination in canonical matters is a direct interference in freedom of faith. The right to the autonomy of religious organizations is guaranteed by the European Convention on Human Rights and reflected in numerous decisions of the European Court of Human Rights. A religious organization has the right to choose its name on its own and the state has no right to coerce it into changing it. These laws directly violate Article 35 of the Ukrainian Constitution, Article 9 of the Convention on Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms, Article 18 of the 1966 International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, Article 18 of the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

Appealing to the head of State V. A. Zelensky, the faithful of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church who attended the congress underlined, “Dear Mr. President, we, the people, citizens of the unified state of Ukraine, are deeply concerned over the fact that the state policy currently in force is directed against millions of believing citizens who belong to the Ukrainian Orthodox Church. We all are Ukrainians, true patriots who love and respect their native land; we work in good faith, treat the ill, fulfil in good faith the military duty, pay taxes and develop various spheres of public life. The Church has never divided and will never divide her faithful according to their origin, social status, ethnicity, language or political preferences. Political preferences and contradictions should not separate parents from children, should not divide married couples, friends or fellow workers. Politics should not sow thorns of hate and anger in our hearts. The preservation of public peace and tranquility in the vortex of today’s events and pandemics is our common duty”.

They have called the president to use his powers provided by Ukrainian law and to take urgent effective measures to protect the constitutional rights of believing citizens who belong to the Ukrainian Orthodox Church and to introduce to the Ukrainian Supreme Rada as a legislative initiative a bill that will cancel Ukrainian Law No. 2673-VIII and Ukrainian Law No. 2662-VIII (which, along with the things causing the violation of the constitutional rights and freedoms of Ukrainian citizens, bear a threat to the authority of our state on the international scene, challenge the sincerity of the Euro-integrational aspirations proclaimed by Ukraine, the realization of which is impossible in a situation of human rights and freedom violations and especially the rights of vulnerable sections of the population to which believers belongs).

They made similar appeals to the speaker and members of the Supreme Rada and to the prime minister.

The participants in the congress of representatives of captured churches also asked D. A. Shmygal to introduce a moratorium on any registration action to change confessional affiliation and forceful re-naming of religious communities of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church before amendments are made to the Ukrainian Law ‘On Freedom of Conscience and Religious Organizations’.

The appeals to Ukrainian state officials are concluded with calls to ‘unite efforts and resources in order to create equal and safe conditions for life in Ukraine and to eradicate any form of violence towards believers’.

DECR Communication Service
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