Presidential Office receives an appeal from the faithful of the canonical Church



Over a million of people have signed an appeal to Ukrainian President Vladimir Zelensky on the persecution of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church.

On April 1, 2021, representatives of communities in various dioceses of the canonical Church's - such as those in Volyn, Zhitomir, Rovno and Sarny, who have become victims of raiding actions of the 'OCU' and 'Patriarchate of Kiev' - arrived in Kiev. They brought to the Presidential Office several weighty boxes with signatures.

Before that, the faithful had assembled on St Vladimir Hill to pray for peace in the Ukrainian land.

In their appeal, the faithful of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church called President Zelensky to use his constitutional right of initiative in the Supreme Rada and bring in as urgent the bills on recognizing as invalid the amendments introduces by the parliament to Ukrainian Law Nos 2673-VIII and 2662-VIII.

It is noted that these laws violate the rights of believers and contradict the constitutional principle of the separation of church and state. The appeal emphasizes, 'In recent years, the Ukrainian Ministry of

Culture has applied these anti-constitutional laws exclusively to the Ukrainian Orthodox Church and forcibly sought to deprive her of her own name. Officials have violated the principle of the equality of all the religious confessions and disabled our religious organization among others, which is discrimination on religious ground against millions of believing citizens who belong to the Ukrainian Orthodox Church. Interfering in the internal affairs of the Church, state officials seek to impose their own understanding of her religious and hierarchical structure. They have violated the Ukrainian Constitution provisions that exclude the opportunity for establishing special requirements for the names of particular religious organizations and regulate the right of each to confess any religion. Therefore, the UOC religious communities have been continually pressurized between state bodies and raiders; we are prevented from amending our constituent documents, changing the leadership, opening accounts in banking establishments, using notary services, registering the rights to the land under church buildings, etc.

The faithful of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church who have signed the appeal to the Ukrainian president stated, ‘The use of anti-constitutional laws by church raiders has led to daily destabilization of the religious situation in society, to aggravation of the level of freedom of faith in Ukraine, to creation of essential obstacles for the religious and social service of Churches and religious organizations’.

They also reminded the president that the laws on the compulsory change of the name and subjection run contrary to both the Ukrainian Constitution and the norms of international law in force. ‘The compulsory change of the name and jurisdiction in the canonical matters of religious organizations (associations) is a direct interference in freedom of faith’, the appeal states, ‘The right of religious organizations (associations) to autonomy is guaranteed by the European Convention on Human Rights and is reflected in numerous rulings of the European Court of Human Rights. A religious organization has a right to choose its name on its own and a state has no right to change it’.

‘It should be pointed out that Ukrainian Law No. 2673-VIII and Ukrainian Law No. 2662-VIII also violate the constitutional rights and freedoms of Ukrainian citizens, bear a threat to peace and tranquility in our state, The Ukrainian Orthodox Church and her faithful have repeatedly appealed to you with a request to withdraw these anti-church norms from these laws but, except for noncommittal replies, there was no response to them. We consider it inadmissible for the guarantor of the Ukrainian Constitution and the rights and freedoms of a person and a citizen to disregard the interests of his voters and the millions-strong Orthodox society’, states the appeal handed over to the Presidential Office.

The appeal ‘on the implementation of the constitutional right of initiative in the Ukrainian Supreme Rada aimed to defend the rights of persons (lay people) who belong to the UOC faithful’ was accepted and registered in the Presidential Office as Item 22/016975-I.

Earlier that same day, a press conference was held in Kiev on ‘An appeal of the UOC faithful to the

authority: discriminatory laws and oppression. The head of the Synodal Information-Education Department of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church, Metropolitan Clement of Nezhen and Pryluky pointed out, ‘These over million signatures, which you see today, are actually only a small part of the representation of the citizens who are the faithful of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church and who live throughout Ukraine. Certainly, representatives of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church are much more in number. They are lawful citizens and those who have voted for this authority. Therefore, this authority should listen to them and hear their lawful demands’.

According to Metropolitan Clement, as of today, over ten bills have been passed to the Supreme Rada that one way or another violate the rights of believers in Ukraine and contradict the basic law of the country, which is the Constitution.

DECR Communication Service
With reference to the Information-Education Department
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