

Press conference on ‘Appeal of the Faithful of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church to Authorities: Discriminatory Laws and Persecution’



On April 1, 2021, a press conference was held on ‘The Appeal of the UOC Faithful to Authorities: Discriminatory Laws and Persecution’, at the Ukraiskiye Novosti’ new agency in Kiev. It was led by the head of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church’s synodal department-education department, Metropolitan Clement of Nezhin and Priluki.

Participating in the briefing were also Archpriest Vitaly Durov, rector of the St, Michael church at the Zadubrovka village, diocese of Chernovtsy and Bukovina; Mr. Yury Reshetnikov, chairman of the State Committee for the Affairs of the Ethnicities and Religions in 2009-2010, and Mr. Kost Bondarenko, a political scientist.

The press conference was devoted to the address the faithful of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church in all the regions in Ukraine sent to the Ukrainian authorities concerning the continued escalation of religious

conflicts provoked by the Ukrainian Supreme Rada's adoption of laws inconsistent with the Ukrainian Constitution and leading in their implementation to the violation of fundamental rights and freedoms of conscience and religious beliefs of millions of the citizens of our country.

Metropolitan Clement reported that as of that day, about ten bills handed in to the Supreme Rada violate in this or that way the rights of the faithful in Ukraine and contradict her basic law - the Constitution.

His Eminence reminded the journalists that as far back as last December the Holy Synod of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church appealed on behalf the episcopate, clergy and laity to authorities but received no response.

For this reason, 'the faithful took this matter in their hands and collected signatures under their appeals in all the dioceses of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church to draw the attention of authorities to facts of discrimination against the Ukrainian Orthodox Church and to the violation of the Ukrainian Constitution caused by the adoption of anti-church laws.

The appeal to the Ukraine's President Vladimir Zelensky, Cabinet of Ministers and other state bodies was signed by 1 060 238 citizens of Ukraine.

The head of the Information-Education Department reported that concurrently the faithful of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church would come to the Presidential Office to hand over personally the boxes with the appeals since the authorities do not respond to letters sent by mail.

Political scientist Kost Bondarenko noted in particular that under President Peter Poroshenko, the state, contrary to all the constitutional principles, initiated a gross interference in church affairs and expressed a hope that the present authorities 'will have enough good sense to settle the situation'. He also drew the journalists' attention to the fact that the present 'paralysis' of the Constitutional Court prevents the consideration of an appeal of people's deputies who demand to recognize as unlawful some legislative initiatives concerning the Church.

Archpriest Vitaly Durov, who endured a raiding attack made by representatives of the 'OCU', spoke about gross violations of the rights of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church faithful in Bukovina and called on public officials to ensure the rights of believers of all confessions.

The priest stressed that neither anti-church bills nor raiding captures committed by those who call themselves patriots could have ever happened in a democratic country; for patriotism also means respect for the option of others. 'We respect your option, but do have respect for our option as well', he said addressing the 'OCU' supporters and officials who support them. 'We are all citizens of Ukraine; we

were born here and wish to be treated as fellow citizens’.

Out of 450 priests in the diocese of Chernovtsy, only two have moved to the ‘OCU’, the archpriest attested. He said that the faithful of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church in some villages, where attempts at capturing churches in raids were made, even offered the ‘OCU’ supporters a considerable financial assistance so that they could build a church for themselves but they refused it.

‘Both physical violence and moral pressure on the Ukrainian Orthodox Church communities throughout Ukraine - all this is described as ‘shifts’ and ‘creation’ of a united Church. We observe this absurdity today. These events have become possible only because laws have been adopted that grant preferences to a certain confession’, Metropolitan Clement remarked.

His Eminence also emphasized that such cases proved to become more intensive before and during pre-election campaigns ‘when certain political forces simply play on the religious factor’.

In addition, according to the metropolitan, there is yet another factor that helps deepen the schism in Ukraine; it is a possible visit of Patriarch Bartholomew of Constantinople. ‘We clearly see that there is a wish to create an appearance or a certain statistics to prove that the processes initiated by Patriarch Bartholomew and Poroshenko have not ceased but have a continuation’, he said with reference to the opinion of experts who predict an even greater pressure to be made on the Ukrainian Orthodox Church, including on legislators, in anticipation of the Patriarch of Constantinople’s arrival in Ukraine.

Expert in religions Yury Reshetnikov noted that in 2019, 73% of the Ukrainian citizens gave their assessment to the actions of the previous authorities, including those in the sphere of religion, by voting for a new president. However, regrettably, all the negative processes provoked by the previous authorities continued. ‘The unconstitutional laws of the previous authorities could be cancelled by the decision of the present Supreme Rada’, he said, ‘However, the authority in force ignores these problems, just as it ignores the Ukrainian legislation’. He stressed that thus the position of millions of Ukrainian citizens is not taken into account while according to the anti-church law ‘on renaming’ none of the 13 000 communities of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church can accept amendments to its status ‘only because someone feels like renaming the Ukrainian Orthodox Church’.

Concluding the event, Metropolitan Clement summed up, ‘Our meeting today is an attempt once again to break an information vacuum that is being created artificially. All the cases of violation of the fundamental rights of the Ukrainian citizens are artificially suppressed. And for this reason we call upon the mass media to pay attention to the situation’. His Eminence Clement also noted that in spite of the fact that the authorities have so far ignored the appeals of the faithful, ‘we should do everything possible that the voice of our citizens may be heard. And there are many constitutional and lawful possibilities for

it'.

'Over a millions signatures that you see today here are only a small part of the representation of the citizens who are faithful to the Ukrainian Orthodox Church and live throughout Ukraine', the metropolitan said, 'certainly, the number of people of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church is much greater. They are lawful citizens who have chosen these authorities. For this reason, they should listen to them and hear their lawful demands'.

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