Address of the DECR chairman Metropolitan Anthony of Volokolamsk at the meeting of the UN Security Council



On January 17, 2023, Metropolitan Anthony of Volokolamsk, chairman of the Moscow Patriarchate's Department for External Church Relations, delivered an on-line address at the meeting of the United Nations Security Council.

Dear Mr. Chairman:

I thank you for the opportunity to address this distinguished gathering. The Russian Orthodox Church on her own and in cooperation with other Orthodox Churches, the Roman Catholic Church, Protestant confessions and representatives of world traditional religions is taking part within the realm of possibility in defending the rights of religious believers all over the world, and Christians in particular. At present we have grave concerns about the flagrant violation of human and constitutional rights of Orthodox Christians in Ukraine.

It is difficult to overestimate peacemaking potential of Church and religion in interstate and civil

conflicts. Orthodox Christianity has been a common spiritual and cultural basis of the life of people in Russia and Ukraine for many centuries and could help restore mutual understanding in future. Yet, the very basis of such dialogue is being undermined in Ukraine right now by the Ukrainian authorities' attempts to destroy the Ukrainian Orthodox Church which is not a political, but religious organization uniting over 12,000 communities and millions of Ukrainian citizens.

On December 1, 2022, the Ukraine's National Security and Defence Council took a decision which in actual fact restricts the rights of communities of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church. The executive body issued instructions:

– to draft a bill "on the impossibility of activities in Ukraine of religious organizations affiliated with centers of influence in Russia." Actually, this means the ban of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church, though her governing centre is in Kiev and not in Moscow and she is independent of the Russian Orthodox Church in its administration;

– to step up the Ukrainian special forces' counterintelligence "measures" in relation to the Ukrainian Orthodox Church;

– to deprive the Ukrainian Orthodox Church (UOC) of the right of using church buildings located on the territory of the most important historic monastery – the Kiev Laura of the Caves;

– to impose the so-called sanctions against the UOC clergymen.

On the same day, President of Ukraine Volodymyr A. Zelensky affirmed the decision in his decree. His decrees issued later include a list of the "sanctioned" bishops of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church. On top of everything else, the "sanctions" mean the deprivation of the right to administer property in the territory of Ukraine. Moreover, the Ukrainian mass media report that some bishops of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church have been deprived of Ukrainian citizenship by President Zelensky's decree. This can be used for their forcible expulsion from the country.

Whereas Article 25 of the Constitution of Ukraine states: "A citizen of Ukraine shall not be deprived of citizenship and of the right to change citizenship. A citizen of Ukraine shall not be expelled from Ukraine."

Article 9 of the UN Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness, to which Ukraine acceded in 2013, states: "A Contracting State may not deprive any person or group of persons of their nationality on racial, ethnic, religious or political grounds."

The proscription lists of the Ukrainian bishops and clergymen are issued by the Ukraine's National Security and Defence Council without lawful judicial and investigative procedures and without an option of appealing against the decision. "Sanctions" and deprivation of citizenship are being applied against clergymen of one confession exclusively, whereas Article 24 of the Constitution of Ukraine states that there shall be no privileges or restrictions of the rights of Ukrainian citizens based on religious beliefs.

Therefore, the deprivation of citizenship of Ukrainian religious figures is a form of mass political repression that contravenes the Constitution of Ukraine and international agreements adopted by this state. Infringed in this case are the rights and freedoms the restriction of which is banned by the Constitution of Ukraine even under the conditions of martial law or a state of emergency.

Since October 2022, the Ukraine's Security Service has been carrying out mass searches in monasteries and communities of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church throughout the country on the pretext of "counterintelligence measures." Honour and dignity of clergymen are humiliated; the mass media circulate false slanderous rumors. Criminal proceedings are being instituted against bishops and clergymen of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church on the basis of flimsy excuses and pretexts. As in the years of atheistic persecutions in the Soviet Union, they are unreasonably accused of anti-state activities. Often enough, old newspapers and magazines, books on theology and history from private libraries of the victims are used as incriminating evidence.

Political repressions against bishops of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church have become the culmination of the repressive religious policy of the Ukrainian authorities in recent years. The final aim is the total control of the religious life of society by the government bodies in contravention of Article 35 of the Constitution of Ukraine on the separation of the Church from the State.

In 2018, the so-called "Orthodox Church of Ukraine" was created with active anticonstitutional interference of the state apparatus and Ukrainian special services and with gross violations of the Orthodox canon law. The authorities' further actions are aimed at forcing the communities of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church to join the new religious organization which has been created by the Ukrainian state and stays in its good graces.

In 2019, the new norms of religious legislation were introduced in Ukraine to simplify the raider seizures of church buildings through bogus referenda among residents of the territorial entities with the participation of the outsiders who can be armed and disregard of the opinion of the members of religious communities of these churches. The seizures are accompanied by falsification of documents, blatant violation of law, mass conflicts and clashes, and beating of the faithful and clergy. One hundred and twenty-nine church buildings of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church were seized in 2022. The legal registration of her new communities has been completely blocked.

In the same year, a law was passed on changing the name of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church with an easily recognized aim to alienate her property. The law did not conform with the Constitution of Ukraine, and a group of deputies of the Verkhovna Rada lodged a complaint. The law was suspended pending the examination by the Constitutional Court of Ukraine. Yet, last month this law was carried into effect. At present there are seven more bills registered in the Verkhovna Rada aimed at the restriction of the rights of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church or at her eradication. The lawmakers do not veil the aim of their projects which is to restrict the rights of communities and the faithful of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church, to forcibly take away her property, deprive her of her historical and legal name, prohibit her to be named Orthodox and, finally, to ban her activities and completely eradicate her in the territory of Ukraine.

By defying the principle of separation of the Church from the State affirmed by Article 35 of the Constitution of Ukraine, the Ukrainian government agencies and municipalities are actually prohibiting the use of the inner church theological and canonical criteria in appraising events and developments connected with religion and officially demand the communities of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church to join other religious organizations.

The unbridled campaign of slander against the Ukrainian Orthodox Church is being waged by the Ukrainian mass media with the calls to impose absolute ban on her activities, to use pressure and violence against her representatives, this being a clear sign of the hate language. This kind of media coverage has led to the wave of violence against the faithful, including many cases of vandalism and arson attacks on church buildings, beating of the clergymen or even attempted murders sometimes during divine services.

Mr. Chairman, esteemed Council members, in conclusion of my address I would like to call you to pay attention to the unlawful actions of the Ukrainian state authorities with regard to the largest confession of the country, to numerous facts of the violation of the rights of the faithful guaranteed by the UN Charter, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the UN Declaration on the Elimination of All Forms of Intolerance and Discrimination Based on Religion or Belief; the International Covenant on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination, and many other international documents that guarantee the inalienable right of religious freedom to every human being.

Thank you for your attention.

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