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His Holiness Patriarch Kirill addresses religious leaders and representatives of international organizations due to the situation around the Kiev Lavra of the Caves



On March 11, 2023, His Holiness Patriarch Kirill of Moscow and All Russia addressed the Primates of the Local Orthodox Churches and a number of religious leaders and representatives of international organizations with messages sharing his profound concern over the resurgence of intense state pressure on Orthodox Christians in Ukraine. As is known, on March 10, the administration of the National Preserve 'The Kievo-Pechersky Lavra' of the Ukrainian Ministry of Culture and Information Policy notified the Ukrainian Orthodox Church's community of the Kiev Lavra of the Caves - the Pechersky Lavra of the Assumption about the termination of the contract on the use of the churches and buildings of the monastery and demanded that the community should leave the territory of the monastery until the 29th of March.

His Holiness pointed out that this decision was preceded by a whole series of the measures of pressure on the monastic community of the Kiev Lavra of the Caves. He recalled in particular the humiliating searches organized by the Ukrainian special services in monastery buildings and the brethren's quarters in November 2022 and the dissolution on December the 31th of the same year of the contract

with the monastery on the use of the two largest churches of the monastery. The pressure also included a months-long libellous information campaign against the monastery with the participation of the state mass media, TV channels as well as radical politicians and religious and public figures who called to withdraw it from the community's use and even to forcibly take it over.

'The Kiev Lavra of the Caves is the first monastery of the Kievan Rus', which has existed since the 11th century; it is the founder of the common spiritual and monastic tradition of the Russian, Ukrainian and Belorussian peoples. It is the cradle of our civilization and national cultures', Patriarch Kirill reminded, 'Here the first historical manuscript of the Old Russia 'The Tale of Bygone Years' was written; from here the written language and literature of our peoples originated.

Throughout its millennium-long history, the monastery suffered from invasions, alien conquests and blunt persecutions against Christians. But it was only under the militant atheistic power in the 20th century that the monks of the Kiev Lavra of the Caves were driven out of the monastery'.

But for all that, His Holiness noted, 'the new generations of monks revived the monastery and exerted tremendous efforts and spent considerable funds - with the state's minimal aid and even the absence of such - to restore the monastery, to rebuild the now taken away Church of the Assumption and the Refectory Church, but above all to revive in it the former spiritual traditions and full-fledged monastic life'.

Stating that today the Kiev Lavra of the Caves is a shrine of general Orthodox importance, the churches of which attract thousands of pilgrims, His Holiness Kirill stressed, 'The Lavra remains one of the largest Orthodox monasteries in the world as it united over two hundreds monks and novices. Located in its territory are also the administration center of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church and the lodgings for hundreds of the future clergy - students of Kiev Theological Academy and Seminary'.

The Primate of the Russian Orthodox Church made a special mention of the fact that the state authorities' ultimatum presented to the Kiev Monastery of the Caves and published by the Ukrainian mass media 'shows up the absence of adequate legal substantiation'. Moreover, 'the work of a certain commission for searching violations in the accounting procedure was not transparent, and its repressive aim - the full banishment of the monks from the Lavra - was not concealed by state officials and representatives of other Ukrainian religious organizations influenced by secular authorities'.

'It is regrettable that while the Ukrainian state leaders declare their commitment to democratic norms, to the European way of development and adherence to human rights and freedoms, these rights and freedoms are violated in the most glaring way', His Holiness Patriarch Kirill stressed.

His Holiness called religious leaders and representatives of international organizations 'to exert every effort to prevent the coercive closure of the monastery as it will lead to the violation of millions of the Ukrainian believers' rights to the freedom of religion guaranteed by the Ukrainian Constitution, as well as such documents as the United Nations Charter, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the Declaration on the Elimination of All Forms of Intolerance and of Discrimination Based on Religion or Belief, and many other acts of international importance.

The appeals have been sent in particular to the Primates of the Local Orthodox Church, Pope Francis of Rome, Patriarch of the Coptic Church Tawadros II, head of the Anglican Communion Archbishop of Canterbury Justin Welby, General Secretary of the World Council of Churches Dr Jerry Pillay, United Nations Secretary-General Antonio Guterres, OSCE General Secretary Helga Maria Schmid, Secretary General of the Council of Europe Marija Pejčinović Burić, UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Volker Turk, Director of the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights Matteo

Mecacci.

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