



## The policy of the Ukrainian authorities to destroy the Ukrainian Orthodox Church was stated at a meeting of the UN Security Council



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On 26 July 2023, a meeting of the United Nations Security Council was held, the topic of which was the persecution of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church by the Ukrainian authorities.

In her statement, the Director of the Alliance of Civilisations, Ms. Nihal Saad, stated in particular that, according to the **"Review of the human rights situation in Ukraine"** published by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, during the reporting period from February to April, violence against members and supporters of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church had increased.

For instance, the Ukrainian authorities conducted searches in places of worship and other facilities of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church, announced suspicions against clergymen and placed several of them under house arrest, including one of the main hierarchs of the UOC, on the basis of little or no evidence (at the moment, Metropolitan Pavel of Vyshgorod and Chernobyl is in custody - note). In addition, the

Ministry of Culture of Ukraine prematurely cancelled the contract with the Ukrainian Orthodox Church regarding the lease of the Kiev Pechersk Lavra. Also mentioned were illegal decisions of a number of city and regional councils, which banned the activities of the canonical Church on their territory, and actions of local councils, which are aimed at cancelling agreements with it regarding the lease of municipal property.

"Thus, we are concerned that the cumulative impact of the government's actions against the Ukrainian Orthodox Church may be discriminatory," summarised Nihal Saad.

She also described as a worrying sign "an upsurge in hate speech and a number of incidents of violence against members of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church". According to the report, "officials, bloggers and opinion leaders used discriminatory and inflammatory rhetoric and openly incited violence" against clergy and supporters of the canonical Church, while "the government and law enforcement agencies failed to take effective action against incidents of hate speech".

One of the speakers at the UN Security Council meeting was a well-known Kiev journalist and writer **Yan Taksyur**, who underwent imprisonment because he spoke in defence of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church against the oppression by the Ukrainian state.

"My personal story is only a small part of the persecution and the terror that has been unleashed against the Ukrainian Orthodox Church and its followers in the last few years," emphasised Yan Taksyur. He reminded that "hundreds and thousands of parishes of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church have either already been forcibly transferred to the organisation known as the "Orthodox Church of Ukraine" or live under the threat of seizure and transfer" of their churches to this structure. The speaker also pointed to the actions of the Ukrainian authorities aimed at expelling the monks of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church from the Kiev Pechersk Lavra and restricting the access of the faithful of the canonical Church to the shrines of the monastery "only because they did not give in to the demand to move to another religious jurisdiction".

"I would like to draw your attention to the fact that in this case the Ukrainian authorities are interfering in the area of the sacred - in the area of the relationship between man and God. This is an area where politics and geopolitics have no place," Yan Taksyur said.

The writer drew the attention of the meeting participants to the fates of hierarchs, priests and laity of the canonical Church who are facing heavy accusations that are not supported by evidence. Among them is **Metropolitan Pavel of Vyshgorod and Chernobyl**, who is imprisoned in an investigative detention centre. And, for example, Metropolitan Theodosy of Cherkassy and Kaniv has been under house arrest for a long time.

"At present, the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine is holding a draft law on the complete ban of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church, unheard of in the history of law, and deputies are declaring their readiness to vote in favour of it. In other words, the Ukrainian authorities are going to wipe off the face of the earth the Church in which millions of the country's citizens were baptised, married and buried," said Yan Taksyur, stressing that "such a situation is unacceptable; it is illegal and criminal in the face of God and people".

This topic was also touched upon in the statement by the Acting Permanent Representative of the Russian Federation to the United Nations, D. A. Polyansky, who said, in particular: "Just realise that the parliament in Kiev is considering a legislative ban and seizure of the property of a canonical Church with a centuries-long history, to which the majority of believers in Ukraine belong. Analogues to such a cynical act cannot be found in modern history." The diplomat suggested reflecting on this: "Can any other country's parliament, at the suggestion of the president of the same country, pass a law banning the Church, whose members are the majority of believers in that country?"

He drew the attention of those present to the fact that the current authorities of Ukraine are consistently pursuing a state policy of destroying canonical Orthodoxy in that country: the arsenal of measures taken includes legal bans, systematic searches, raiding of churches, interrogations of parishioners and clergy, their arrests, physical violence, and vandalism. State and pro-government media systematically publish false information discrediting the Church and its hierarchs.

The diplomat also pointed to the unprecedented nature of the situation with the Abbot of the Kiev-Pechersk Lavra: "For the first time in modern history, a high-ranking hierarchy of the Church is being persecuted by the state and sent to prison for his faith".

D.A. Polyanskiy stated that the scale of the persecution of the clergy of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church by the Ukrainian authorities "resembles the most tragic totalitarian episodes of world history". For instance, only from October 2022 to May 2023, the Security Service of Ukraine conducted about 100 searches in monasteries, churches and administrative buildings of dioceses of the canonical Church throughout Ukraine. Almost 250 clerics of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church were banned from entering the country - they found themselves pariahs in their native land. Sixty-one criminal cases have been opened against clerics, including fourteen bishops, on charges of "state treason" and "inciting religious discord." Seven clerics have been given court sentences. Nineteen bishops were deprived of Ukrainian citizenship under various pretexts.

"By showing cruelty to Metropolitan Pavel, Kiev is seeking to break by force the resistance of Orthodox Christians who are fighting for their canonical Church, and above all to break the resistance of the monks of the main shrine of Orthodoxy in Ukraine, the Kiev-Pechersk Lavra, whom the Kiev authorities

are forcing to leave the monastery," stressed D. A. Polyanskiy. He said that as of 14 July at least eight buildings located on the territory of the Lavra were closed, and parishioners gathering in support of the brethren of the monastery were dispersed by the police.

At the same time, it was noted that the tragedy of the Kiev Pechersk Lavra represents only the visible part of the iceberg - the war against canonical Orthodoxy is taking place throughout Ukraine. At the regional level, primarily in western Ukraine, a campaign to ban the Ukrainian Orthodox Church has already been launched. The relevant decisions in April-May 2023 were adopted in Volyn, Ivano-Frankivsk, Zhytomyr, Lviv, Rivne, Chernovtsy, and Khmelnytsky regions. The councils of Lviv, Ivano-Frankivsk, Kirovohrad, Chernivtsi, Ternopil and Rivne regions called on the Verkhovna Rada to ban the canonical Church throughout the country. The city councils of Brovary, Kamyanets-Podilskyi, Sumy, and Chernivtsi passed resolutions to confiscate land plots of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church. One of the recent cases of direct seizure of church buildings was the **situation in the city of Bila Tserkva**, where on 10 July 2023, schismatics from the "OCU" cut the locks, broke down the doors of the cathedral, blocked the gates and did not let the faithful inside. The invaders were supported by local authorities and police.

The topic of persecution by the Ukrainian State authorities against the Ukrainian Orthodox Church was also raised at a meeting of the United Nations Security Council on the 17<sup>th</sup> of January of this year. At that meeting, Metropolitan Anthony of Volokolamsk, Chairman of the Department for External Church Relations of the Moscow Patriarchate, **made a statement** on the situation of the canonical Church in Ukraine.

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