



THE RUSSIAN ORTHODOX CHURCH
Department for External Church Relations

Metropolitan Theodosy of Cherkassy and Kanev: the truth on the situation of the believers of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church is entering Western society



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On the 29th of January 2024, the human rights organisation "Public Advocacy", which is a member of the International Human Rights Association "Church against Xenophobia and Religious Discrimination" published some international documents indicating that an investigation into the facts of violations of the rights of believers of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church has been launched on the international level.

In particular, a joint request - **communication** on violations of the rights of believers of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church from the UN Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Religion or Belief, the UN Special Rapporteur on the Rights of Minorities, the UN Special Rapporteur on the Rights to Freedom of Peaceful Assembly and of Association was made public. The content of the official response to that request by the Permanent Mission of Ukraine to the UN and other international organisations has also become known.

As a result of their consideration of the array of evidence and facts, the authors of the joint enquiry listed facts which they had found concerning. Among them were criminal prosecution of a number of

hierarchs, including the sentence already passed on Metropolitan Jonathan of Tulchyn and Bratslav, personal sanctions against Bishops, cancellation of the agreement for the Ukrainian Orthodox Church to use the premises of the Kiev-Pechersk Lavra as a monastery on a free-of-charge basis, searches in several monastic monasteries, educational institutions and other premises of the UOC in Kiev, Rovno, Zhytomyr, Ivano-Frankovsk, Chernovtsi, Dnepropetrovsk, Khmelnytskyi, Cherkasy, Volyn, Kherson, Ternopol, Poltava and Transcarpathian regions, a marked increase in incidents of hate speech and calls to violence against Ukrainian Orthodox Church believers, with several city and regional councils also banning "UOC activities" in their areas.

In the final part of the communication statement, the UN Special Rapporteurs stated: "...we wish to express our concern about an alleged pattern of harassment against the UOC and its believers, which appears to be related to the legitimate and peaceful exercise of their rights to freedom of religion or belief, to freedom of expression and to freedom of association enshrined in articles 18, 19 and 22 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) ratified by the state of Ukraine in 1973. In particular, we are concerned about this pattern of intimidation depicted by the abovementioned allegations targeting the UOC monastic community and believers to change their religious affiliation. This runs counter to the prohibition of coercion enshrined in article 18 of the ICCPR. We are also concerned about the resultant backlash (due to the calls to violence and administrative sanctions imposed on the UOC in general) that may be faced by UOC believers which effectively restrict their right to manifest their religion."

As noted by the human rights organisation Public Advocacy, the text of the communication statement of the UN Special Rapporteurs thus testifies to the recognition at the international level of the facts of violation of the rights of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church in the course of the implementation of the systemic policy of discrimination against this religious organization and restriction of the rights of its hierarchy and believers.

Metropolitan Theodosy of Cherkassy and Kanev, a hierarch of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church, human rights activist, initiator and co-founder of the International Human Rights Association "The Church against Xenophobia and Religious Discrimination", made a comment on the publication of these documents. In his opinion, "for the first time in the last few years, international figures with diplomatic status of UN officials and authorised to consider individual complaints about violations of the rights of believers, raised specific questions to the Government of Ukraine on the facts of violations of the rights of believers and expressed not only serious concerns about such violations, but also assessed the actions of the current leadership of the country as inconsistent with the norms of international law. If earlier we observed only some comments or references to violations of the rights of the UOC believers in the reports of the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, now there is a document that provides evidence of a rather deep consideration of the situatio with the UOC in international organisations".

At the same time, the archpastor notes that the representatives of the state bodies that prepared their response to this enquiry (and the text of the response indicates that it was prepared by three ministries at once, as well as the SBU), "ignored a number of questions from international mandate holders, and on a number of points provided, in our opinion, unreliable information". In particular, the diplomats and relevant ministries that drafted the response to the UN enquiry did not provide any comments or explanations at all in connection with the criminal prosecution of the hierarchs of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church. Although the UN Special Rapporteurs asked for explanations regarding the sentencing of the already convicted Metropolitan Jonathan of Tulchyn and Bratslav, they expressed their desire to receive explanations regarding other criminal cases opened against hierarchs of the UOC, as well as regarding the application of sanctions against them. In addition, the international enquiry concerned the decisions of local government bodies on expropriation of land plots from the Church and other discriminatory

actions. "However, such information was not provided by the Ukrainian officials at all, and in this part the international request was completely ignored by our authorities," Metropolitan Theodosy of Cherkasy and Kanev stated.

"It should be noted that violations of the rights of believers of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church are more and more widely discussed in foreign media, as a result of which more and more truthful information about the situation of believers enters the Western society," mentioned the hierarch. - "For example, participants of our human rights association "Church against Xenophobia and Discrimination" have recently distributed a press release at the Geneva Press Club about violations of the rights of UOC believers in Ukraine. All these events, especially the continuing activity of Orthodox believers in defence of their Church and faith, form an ever-increasing international attention to the cases of violations of the rights of the UOC believers, which in turn will lead to an increasingly acute reaction of the international community to the facts of violations of the rights of the UOC".

He urged the Ukrainian authorities to think about the long-term effect of the discriminatory policy towards the Ukrainian Orthodox Church: "And if our state politicians continue to generate such a number of easily provable facts of hatred towards the believers of the UOC (and in fact towards their own people), it will be quite enough to form a mass of international processes against Ukrainian officials-offenders. According to my information these questions have already begun to be discussed, and if the UOC believers will continue to be persecuted in Ukraine, then in the near future there will be formed a large-scale response from individuals and foreign structures defending Orthodoxy at the international level".

In his opinion, among the minimally necessary steps that need to be urgently implemented by the state power of Ukraine is the cessation of discriminatory policy against the Ukrainian Orthodox Church; closure of artificially fabricated criminal cases against hierarchs and priests on trumped-up charges, removal of personal sanctions from them; termination of mass illegal re-registrations by state registrars of religious communities of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church in the 'OCU' based on forged protocols of meetings of outsiders; immediate reactions to any manifestations of violence against believers of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church, as well as to public calls for discrimination against them on religious grounds; refusal of the participation of state bodies in the seizure of historical religious structures and monuments of architecture from the Ukrainian Orthodox Church.

"Summarising all of the above, I would very much like to hope for the remnants of sobriety in the minds and hearts of our statesmen. I would like to believe that at least some of them still retain the ability to be guided in their actions not by immediate political gains and destructive emotions, but by the principles of inviolability of freedoms and human rights, the ideas of strategic state thinking for the good of our society. Stop and listen to the voice of the historical Church of your people - to the voice of the conscience of our people. Before it is finally too late," Metropolitan Theodosy of Cherkasy and Kanev urged.