Ukrainian authorities try to withhold information from world community regarding facts of violation of believers' rights



The Press Service of the Kyiv Caves Lavra issues a statement pointing out that the Ukrainian authorities spread misinformation concerning their actions targeting the canonical Ukrainian Orthodox Church (UOC) and try to conceal facts of violation of believers' rights fr om the world community. The authorities are attempting to completely force the Ukrainian Orthodox Church out of the Lavra after Ukraine has sent an official response to an inquiry fr om the UN special rapporteurs on freedom of religion or belief, minority issues and the rights to freedom of peaceful assembly and of association, **patriarchia.ru** reports citing **TASS** news agency.

"We the monks of the Holy Dormition Kyiv Caves Lavra of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church are compelled to conclude that this response [of the Ukrainian authorities] contains unreliable information, is incomplete, and indicates an attempt by the government of Ukraine, through the relevant ministries, to conceal the facts of violations of the rights of UOC believers and mislead representatives of the international community," the statement reads.

In their response, the authorities claim that the Ukrainian Orthodox Church has been using the Lavra premises only since 2013 when, in compliance with a decree of the Government of Ukraine, the Lower Lavra along with the labyrinths of the Near and Far Caves were provided to the Church for lease without a term lim it. As the statement emphasises, this assertion is not true: “The Monastery has been the [Lavra’s] owner and has been using the Lavra buildings not since 2013, but for about a thousand years, since its foundation in 1051 by monks Anthony and Theodosius in the caves near the Berestovo summer princely residence in the vicinity of Kyiv.”

“The monastery was deprived of its right to use the Lavra against a backdrop of a slander campaign against the Ukrainian Orthodox Church in general and the monastery in particular – both in the media and in statements by high-ranking officials and government bodies,” the Press Service of the Kyiv Caves Lavra adds.

The monastery mentions numerous facts of violation of believers’ rights in Ukraine, among them – sanctions imposed by the authorities on the Lavra’s abbot, Metropolitan Pavel of Vyshhorod and Chernobyl, criminal proceedings against him, seizures of UOC church buildings by activists of the schismatic Orthodox Church of Ukraine (OCU), and inaction of the Ukrainian law enforcement agencies failing to launch investigations into really unlawful actions of the OCU activists.

The Kyiv Caves Monastery appeals to international human rights organisations calling on them to conduct an information campaign and through legal proceedings protect the rights of believers at the international level.

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The Ukrainian authorities are consistent in their attempts to force the Ukrainian Orthodox Church out of the Kyiv Caves Lavra. As far back as March 2023, the “Kyiv Caves Lavra” National Reserve unilaterally terminated the lease agreement with the canonical Church. In early July, representatives of an inventory commission set up by Ukraine’s Ministry of Culture came to the Lavra and, assisted by the police, changed locks, seized and sealed off its buildings. Last August, the court sustained the lease agreement termination and the authorities’ claims to the monastery’s property. After that, visitors could no longer have access to the Lower Lavra wh ere the monastery’s main buildings are located. Besides, students and faculty of the Kyiv Theological Academy and Seminary were barred from entering the Lavra territory. Those who refused to vacate the Lavra hotel buildings were blocked inside. All this came amid believers’ protests.

Meanwhile, the schismatic OCU already holds festive services in the Dormition Cathedral – the Lavra’s main church.

Source: https://mospat.ru/en/news/91397/