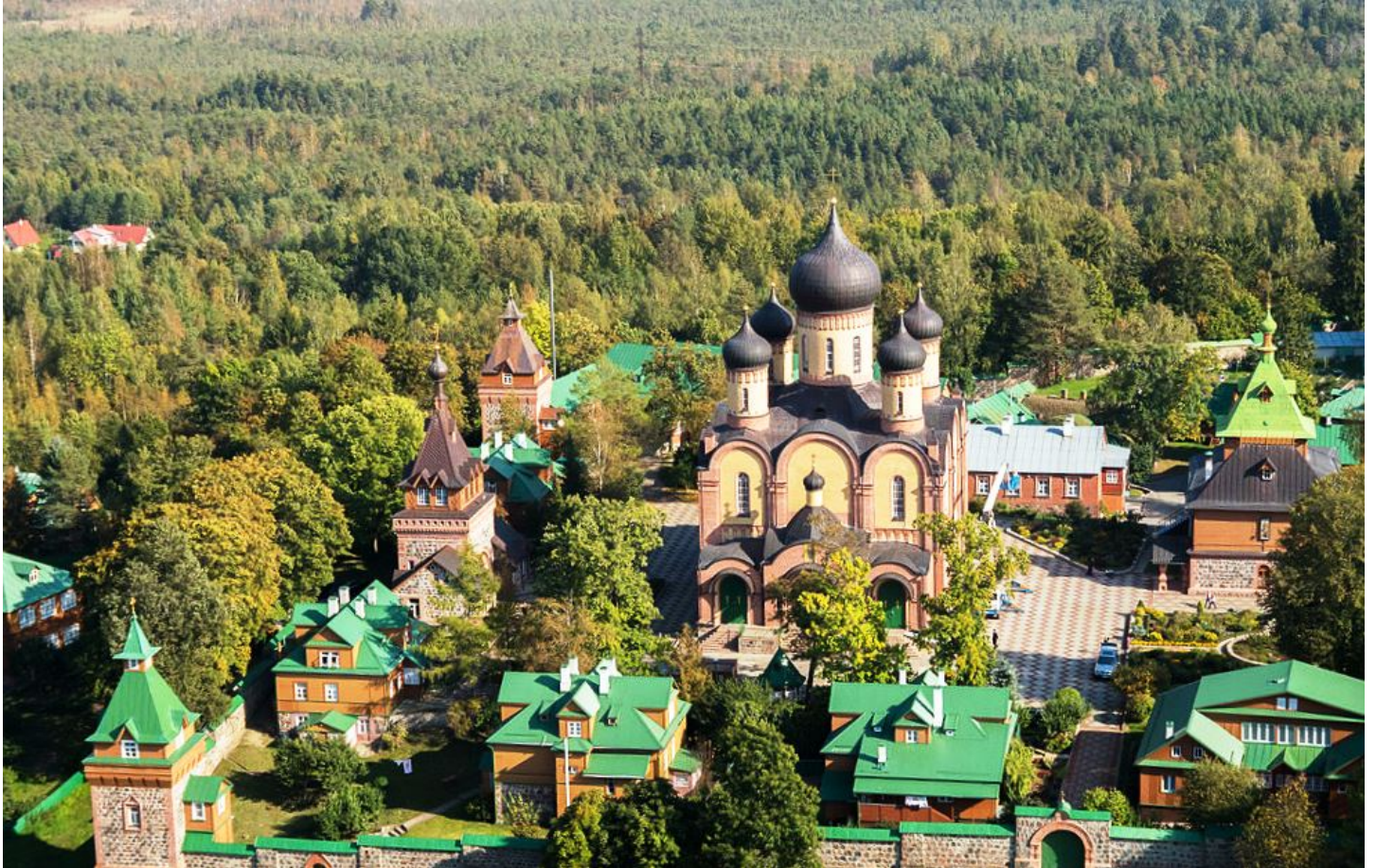




Sisters of Puhtica convent address Estonian Council of Churches with an open letter concerning pressure put on the abode



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The abbess and sisters of the Puhtica Convent of the Dormition of the Mother of God addressed the Estonian Council of Churches and its chairman, Archbishop Urmas Viilma, with an open letter concerning the extremely alarming situation that has developed around the convent.

As previously reported, Mr. Lauri Läänemets, Estonian Minister of the Interior, speaking live on national television on April 11, called on the Parliament to “recognize the Russian Orthodox Church as a terrorist organization” and close down its activities in the country. A week later, a draft statement condemning the Moscow Patriarchate was submitted to the Estonian Parliament.

On April 23, Minister Läänemets said that Orthodox monasteries in the country that refuse to get out of

subordination to the Russian Orthodox Church may be legally forced by the state to cease their activities. On the morning of that day, he arrived at the Puhtica convent to talk with its abbess, hegumeness Filareta (Kalacheva), and some representatives of the convent. He said that the state did not want to escalate the conflict with Orthodox believers and therefore proposes to give consideration to renouncing the status of a stavropegic convent, "in order to rule out the possibility of spiritual influence of Patriarch Kirill of Moscow and All Rus' on it."

In their open letter to the Estonian Council of Churches, sisters of the Puhtica convent write that passions run high, contradictions are sharpening, military conflicts are flaring in the world beyond convent walls and underscored that the current violent conflict in the center of Europe causes them most heartfelt pain. "We beseech the Lord in our incessant prayers to show His gracious power and make peace between conflicting parties to this dreadful conflict that makes us recall the horrors of world wars," the sisters wrote.

They noted with regret that the Puhtica convent and its sisters are being dragged into political contradictions that are essentially alien to monastic life. The authorities of the Republic of Estonia want them to cut their cherished ties with the Russian Orthodox Church and expect them to renounce their stavropegic status on their own initiative.

The letter emphasizes: "Such a step is simply impossible for us. Of course, representatives of the Estonian state authorities may not know or understand this, but you, our brothers in Christ, know the meaning of canonical ties with the Mother Church for the convent. We cannot sever them and have no right to do so unilaterally, because the stavropegic status of the convent is enacted by its Charter, which we are not entitled to change of our own volition.

The convent received the status of a stavropegic in 1990 through endeavours and efforts of the ever-memorable Patriarch Alexy II (Ridiger). His memory is sacred to the sisters of the convent, because it was he who as the bishop of Tallinn saved the monastery from closure during Khrushchev's theomachist times. Founded in 1891, the Puhtica convent has been praying to the Lord for one hundred and thirty-three years, during which the world has undergone radical changes...

We remind you of these changes just to show that our convent has always been superior to the passions of socio-political life and from its first years up to now has kept unflinching faithfulness to the true monastic purpose and mission which are prayer and labour.

That is why we are deeply convinced that intervention of the state in monastic life, which has developed for over a century, is devoid of meaning. People prayed and worked in the convent in Tsarist Russia, in the Soviet Union (USSR), and in the Republic of Estonia, and we sincerely hope that we shall not be

deprived of the opportunity to offer up our prayers to God for granting peaceful life to the whole Earth, all countries and all nations."

The abbess and sisters have asked Estonian Christians of different denominations to render all possible assistance to the Puhtica convent and concluded their letter by expressing their confidence that "every believer understands that all politics, and especially political pressure, are deeply alien to monasticism. Monastery is beyond politics. This is our credo. We dare to hope that your prayers would help get this truth across to the authorities of the Republic of Estonia, whom we hold in high esteem."

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