His Holiness Patriarch Kirill addressed the blatant examples of pressure on the Ukrainian Orthodox Church

DECR Communication Service, 27.04.2024.

On the 27th of April 2024, in connection with new blatant examples of pressure on the Ukrainian Orthodox Church, its episcopate, clergy, communities and monasteries, His Holiness Patriarch Kirill of Moscow and All Rus' has sent messages to the Primates of the Local Orthodox Churches and a number of religious figures, and also addressed representatives of international organisations.

In his messages, the Primate of the Russian Orthodox Church spoke, in particular, about the fact that on April 24th, the Security Service of Ukraine (SBU) conducted searches in the Sviatohirsk Lavra – one of the largest monasteries of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church, well-known in and outside of Ukraine. Its abbot, Metropolitan Arseny of Sviatohirsk, was notified of suspicions against him under political articles. The criminal proceedings against Metropolitan Arseny were instituted based on a sermon he had delivered, in which he had allegedly disclosed information about the disposition of the Ukrainian armed

forces. During the search, Metropolitan Arseny was detained. On April 25, the court arrested him for a period of 60 days. He is now in custody without bail.

"In his allegedly incriminating sermon, Metropolitan Arseny told the worshippers that on the eve of a church feast, September 23, 2023, the SBU officials had set up checkpoints on a road to the monastery and conducted all-out identity checks on hundreds of believers who had been trying to get to the Lavra. While checking their documents, the SBU officials and members of local paramilitary units were illegally gathering the pilgrims' personal data, phone numbers and e-mail addresses, and photographed each of them. In his sermon, Metropolitan Arseny pointed out the discriminatory nature of those identity checks and noted that the mass pilgrimages carried out by other religious confessions in Ukraine had faced no obstructions from the Ukrainian security services. By publicly mentioning the checkpoints Metropolitan Arseny caused no harm to the armed forces of Ukraine. He had an objective reason to do as he did – the pilgrims had faced obstructions when trying to attend divine services."

His Holiness emphasised: "Metropolitan Arseny's sixty-day arrest on the factitious far-fetched grounds comes amid other punitive measures against public spokesmen of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church and its news media "

In this regard, His Holiness Patriarch Kirill of Moscow and All Rus' mentioned that earlier, on March 13th, this year, the SBU reported that a criminal action had been brought against 14 employees of the Union of Orthodox Journalists religious news media on the charges of "high treason," "collaboration" and other crimes.

"The criminal proceedings were initiated due to their work as journalists, that is, because they published information about the violations of the rights of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church's faithful. Those violations were documented, in particular, in the Report on the Human Rights Situation in Ukraine published by the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) on October 4, 2023, and in other documents of the OHCHR and other international human rights organizations. Four of the journalists, including one priest, were arrested and taken into custody, facing many years' or life imprisonment".

As His Holiness Patriarch Kirill noted, in April of this year, the Ukrainian authorities had also blocked, without disclosing the reason, several Orthodox internet news media that were covering the authorities' religious policy and the plight of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church and reported on facts of infringement of its believers' rights.

And on April 12th, the SBU conducted a search at the place of residence of another spokesman of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church – the deputy chairman of its Department for External Church Relations –

having notified him of suspicions against him based on his public speeches. According to the SBU Press Service, he “was trying to discredit Ukraine in the international arena.” The charges against him were brought two days after he had informed a delegation of the Conference of European Churches which had arrived in Kyiv about facts of violation of believers’ rights in Ukraine, in particular, about the danger of a legislative ban to be placed on the Ukrainian Orthodox Church, stated the Patriarch.

His Holiness also raised again the issue of the ongoing preparations in the Ukrainian Parliament for the adoption in the second reading Bill No. 8371 “On Amendments to Certain Laws of Ukraine Regarding the Activities of Religious Organizations in Ukraine,” drafted by the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine. On 19 October 2023, His Holiness Patriarch Kirill delivered **appeals** in connection with the consideration of the document in the first reading. His Holiness emphasised: "The bill is aimed at imposing an actual ban on the Ukrainian Orthodox Church and facilitating the seizure of its churches and property. The legislators themselves openly state their intentions in their public speeches. According to the parliamentarians, the bill may be adopted in the second reading in May this year ".

"The persecutions against the Ukrainian Orthodox Church’s faithful in Ukraine are taking the form of all-out anti-religious terror, with seizures of churches and monasteries, unlawful prosecution against clerics and laypeople, extrajudicial violence and closing down of the news media that reveal the truth about the persecutions." Patriarch Kirill stressed.

He pointed out that "the repressions are directed against those who try to use international forums to speak about the infringement of religious freedom, and their aim is to suppress any public witnessing to the religious persecutions by the time the legislative ban is placed on the Ukrainian Orthodox Church and thousands of its communities in Ukraine.

At the same time, court trials continue of Metropolitan Pavel of Vyshhorod and Chernobyl, abbot of the Kiev Pechersk Lavra; Metropolitan Luke of Zaporizhzhia and Melitopol; Metropolitan Theodosy of Cherkasy and Kanev; Metropolitan Longin of Bancheny; as well as many clergymen. Criminal charges had been brought against all of them. Metropolitan Jonathan of Tulchyn and Bratslav, who was sentenced to five years in prison, is waiting for his case to be heard by the court of appeal.

***

"As pressure is mounting on the Ukrainian Orthodox Church, taking the form of religious persecution, I am compelled to appeal for your support once again, mindful of St. Paul’s words: *Whether one member suffer, all the members* of the Orthodox Church *suffer with it* (1 Cor 12:26)" reads the messages that His Holiness Patriarch Kirill sent, in particular, to the Primates of the Local Orthodox Churches.

His Holiness asked for prayers for the granting of God's help, courage and consolation to the suffering archpastors, pastors and the faithful of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church and urged to raise a voice in their support.

The messages of His Holiness Patriarch Kirill of Moscow and All Rus' were sent to His Beatitude Patriarch John X of Antioch and all the East, His Beatitude Patriarch Theophilos III of the Holy City of Jerusalem and all Palestine, His Holiness and His Beatitude Catholicos-Patriarch Ilia II of All Georgia, His Beatitude Patriarch Porfirije of Serbia, His Beatitude Patriarch Daniel of Romania, the Holy Synod of the Bulgarian Orthodox Church, His Beatitude Archbishop Anastasios of Tirana and all Albania, His Beatitude Metropolitan Sawa of Warsaw and all Poland, His Beatitude Metropolitan Rostislav of the Czech Lands and Slovakia, His Beatitude Metropolitan Tikhon of all America and Canada, His Beatitude Archbishop Stefan of Ohrid and Macedonia, as well as Pope Francis, Patriarch Tawadros II of the Coptic Church, Archbishop Justin Welby, Head of the Anglican Communion, Archbishop of Canterbury, Catholicos of the East and Metropolitan Baselios Marthoma Mathews III of the Malankara Church, Supreme Patriarch and Catholicos of All Armenians Karekin II, Catholicos of the Great House of Cilicia of the Armenian Apostolic Church Aram I, Catholicos-Patriarch of the Assyrian Church of the East Mar Awa III, Maronite Patriarch of Antioch and All the East Bechara Boutros al-Rahi, General Secretary of the World Council of Churches Dr Jerry Pillay, President of the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association Franklin Graham.

***

In the appeal to the leaders and representatives of international organisations, His Holiness Patriarch Kirill of Moscow and All Rus' asked them to "direct their attention to the aforementioned facts of the outrageous infringement of human rights in Ukraine and exert your efforts in order to defend the right to religious freedom of the faithful and communities of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church.".

Among the addressees of the messages are United Nations Secretary-General António Guterres, UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Volker Türk, OSCE Secretary General Helga Maria Schmid, Director of the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights Matteo Mecacci, Secretary General of the Council of Europe Marija Pejčinović-Burić, OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities K. K. Abdrakhmanov, UN Human Rights Council Special Rapporteur on Contemporary Forms of Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance K.P. Ashwini, UN Human Rights Council Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Religion or Belief Nazila Ghani.

Source: https://mospat.ru/en/news/91706/