



Facts of persecution against the faithful of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church reported to the UN Human Rights Council



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On 9th – 11th July 2024, the UN Human Rights Council (UNHRC) held its 56th session.

During the session, UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Volker Türk spoke on a report of the UN Human Rights Monitoring Mission in Ukraine. As part of the deliberations that followed, the participants in the meeting heard several reports concerning the plight of the hierarchs, priests and communities of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church subjected to persecution by the country's authorities.

A video statement was shown, recorded by Metropolitan Theodosiy of Cherkasy and Kaniv. He drew the attention of the UNHRC members to the criminal proceedings instituted against the UOC hierarchs who had made rhetorical remarks regarding canonicity of a certain confession. The criminal prosecution against them is in direct violation of the international legal standards that define such rhetoric as

exercise of the right to the freedom of speech and lawful expression of one's religious beliefs, he noted.

Metropolitan Theodosiy reminded the UNHRC members that according to the Rabat Plan of Action adopted at the international level as the consensus over the matters of rhetoric, people must be held accountable for their speech only if it is followed by inciting calls to violence and specific actions violating the rights of other confessions. The UOC hierarchs, who are being prosecuted in Ukraine today, made no such inciting calls in their speeches, unlike representatives of other confessions who overtly called their supporters, via social networks in particular, to seize churches, banish the UOC clergymen from the country and commit other acts of violence against the faithful of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church.

As the archpastor also pointed out, the law enforcement agencies have prosecuted no one so far for the hate speech against the UOC faithful, which is a proof of the law enforcement system's double standard and collapse of the religious freedom in Ukraine.

Among other speakers was lawyer Robert Amsterdam, whom the Holy Synod of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church engaged to protect the rights of its believers. In his speech, Mr Amsterdam mentioned Bill No. 8371 pending adoption by the Verkhovna Rada in the second reading. If adopted, the bill will impose an actual ban on the Ukrainian Orthodox Church. As Mr Amsterdam also noted, by bringing false criminal charges against the UOC priests, Ukraine is actually holding them hostage to use later in prisoners of war exchanges. According to Robert Amsterdam, by accusing the priests, under Article 161, of inciting religious hatred and, in fact, thought crime, the government violates its own Constitution, mixing up church affairs with those of the state and making the OCU a state church.

During the UNHRC 56th session, written statements were spread, containing concrete facts of violations of the rights of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church members and updates on the criminal cases against the faithful.

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