



Estonian Orthodox Church raises concerns over religious freedom violations at UN



**UNITED NATIONS
HUMAN RIGHTS COUNCIL**

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During the 58th session of the UN Human Rights Council in Geneva (February 24 – April 4, 2025), Bishop Daniel of Tartu, representing the Estonian Orthodox Church, voiced concerns regarding a draft law amending Estonia's Churches and Congregations Act.

“The Estonian parliament is currently debating a law that would ban us from maintaining any ties with a religious center in the Russian Federation. However, we cannot abandon our canonical connection, as it is a fundamental part of our faith,” Bishop Daniel stated.

He highlighted that the law includes provisions effectively holding the Estonian Orthodox Church responsible for the actions of religious leaders in another country, thereby violating the principle of individual accountability. “We believe the Estonian authorities’ actions contravene international law and could lead to severe consequences, including fostering societal hatred and human rights violations,” the bishop emphasized.

Bishop Daniel also announced plans to escalate human rights advocacy internationally to ensure a robust legal and diplomatic response to the threats to religious freedom posed by the proposed law, as reported by the Estonian Orthodox Church's website.

The bishop's statements were endorsed by the international human rights alliance Church Against Xenophobia and Discrimination, as well as ECOSOC-accredited organizations such as Public Advocacy and VSI Žmogaus teisių apsauga.

Oleg Denisov, head of Public Advocacy, noted that the proposed amendments, particularly those restricting Estonian religious organizations from freely establishing canonical and organizational ties with foreign religious centers, violate international law.

"These provisions infringe on religious freedom, which includes the right of believers to independently determine their legal and organizational structures, including relationships with foreign religious centers. The state cannot impose conditions on religious practice or demand the severance of historically established canonical ties," Denisov stated. He added that Public Advocacy will support the Estonian Orthodox Church at UN, OSCE, EU human rights bodies, and other relevant forums.

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