



DECR Chairman: the politicization of the World Council of Churches puts its future under threat



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The Central Committee of the World Council of Churches (WCC) has concluded its work in Johannesburg, with the Russian Orthodox Church consistently participating in its sessions. Metropolitan Anthony of Volokolamsk, Chairman of the Moscow Patriarchate's Department for External Church Relations and head of the Russian Orthodox Church delegation, spoke in an interview with RIA Novosti about how the atmosphere within the WCC becomes increasingly politicized year after year under external pressure; the accusations faced by the Russian Orthodox Church; its witness to the persecution of Christians in Ukraine, and whether the anti-Russian stance adopted by some WCC member churches can be considered unanimous.

— Your Eminence, what topics were discussed with representatives of other churches?

— During the plenary sessions, practical issues concerning the work of this major inter-Christian organization were discussed, outcomes were summarized, and plans for the future were made. Additionally, the Central Committee members addressed current political issues, including ongoing

conflicts around the world. In particular, the situation in the Gaza Strip, where a severe humanitarian catastrophe is unfolding before our eyes, was discussed. The escalation of the conflict between Israel and Iran, as well as the situation in Ukraine, were also on the agenda.

Based on my experience in these discussions, I must regrettably note that the work of the World Council of Churches has recently been marked by a high degree of politicization in its debates. This was fully evident at the previous General Assembly in Karlsruhe in 2022, the last Central Committee meeting in Geneva, and now in Johannesburg. In my opinion, the political bias of certain member churches has reached unprecedented levels, inevitably affecting the overall nature of the WCC's work. The WCC is rapidly losing its unique role as a platform for inter-Christian dialogue.

— How was the issue of persecution against canonical Orthodoxy in Ukraine addressed during the WCC Central Committee meeting?

— At the initiative of the Russian Orthodox Church delegation, an extended discussion took place on the situation of the canonical Church in Ukraine. Just before this discussion, horrifying footage from Chernivtsi circulated worldwide, showing militants supported by the so-called "Orthodox Church of Ukraine", a Ukrainian schismatic group, attempting to seize a cathedral. This was accompanied by the beating of clergy, including the ruling bishop of the Chernivtsi Diocese, Metropolitan Meletiy (Yegorenko). Many Central Committee members saw these images.

— What was the reaction to the Russian Church raising this issue?

— During the discussion, I was struck by the cynicism with which some representatives, primarily from Protestant churches, dismissed the facts we presented as "unproven" and tried to derail the discussion. Nevertheless, following a vote, the WCC General Secretary was instructed to examine the issue and, in contact with Ukrainian authorities, express concern over the persecution of believers in the country.

— Were there any anti-Russian statements in this context?

— Representatives of some Scandinavian Protestant churches attempted to push the Central Committee to adopt a statement regarding the alleged forced transfer of Ukrainian children to the Russian Federation. The document contained wildly exaggerated figures: nearly 20,000 children were cited as victims of so-called forced relocation. However, when the discussion turned to the substance of the issue, we reminded the Committee that during the latest round of negotiations between Russia and Ukraine, the Russian side was provided with a list of children allegedly relocated to Russia, which numbered just over 300. The discrepancy was glaring, and we pointed out that the authors of this biased document likely relied on unverified reports from politicized media.

Given the lack of credible evidence, it was entirely unacceptable to lend the WCC's authority to such baseless claims. As a result, the issue was removed from the agenda.

— One of the WCC Central Committee's final documents criticizes the circumstances of the negotiation process between Russia and Ukraine. How was this text discussed?

— The Central Committee was presented with a draft document reviewing current global conflicts, including the situation in Ukraine. After the relevant paragraph was read during the plenary session, I felt compelled to speak. I reminded the Committee that its members are not politicians: we are representatives of our churches. Instead of echoing political clichés readily available in partisan media or political statements, the WCC should focus on delivering fraternal messages of support and comfort to Christians suffering in conflict zones. This, in my view, is sorely lacking in WCC documents. I made the same point in the WCC committee where I serve.

I then addressed specific claims in the draft. Notably, it cited civilian casualty statistics from the Ukraine conflict without specifying their source. I reminded attendees that civilians in Russia have also suffered: particularly after Ukrainian armed forces entered the Kursk region and following terrorist attacks by Ukrainian special services in our country. The document made no mention of this. Are Russian lives less valuable than Ukrainian ones?

Next, I addressed the section on peace negotiations. The draft claimed that talks "cannot be held under the pressure of force" and must not produce an outcome that, in their words, "rewards the aggressor." I reminded the Committee that two years ago in Geneva, Russia was falsely accused of refusing negotiations, with constant calls for talks to begin. Now that they have begun, instead of welcoming them and hoping for success—for an end to the conflict and further loss of life—we are imposing conditions on politicians and dictating how talks should proceed. This is entirely inappropriate. It is not our role.

— What became of the document?

—After debate, the document was put to a vote. Naturally, the Russian Orthodox Church delegation and several others opposed it, and it did not receive unanimous support. We demanded that our dissenting opinion be reflected in the published document, and WCC leadership assured us it would be.

Interviewed by Olga Lipich

Photos provided by Pavel Bednyakov / RIA Novosti
