The UN Human Rights Council review of the human rights situation in Estonia mentions discrimination against the Estonian Orthodox Christian Church

DECR Communication service, 16 April 2026.

Systematic violations of human rights, including in the religious sphere, are noted in a**compilation of materials** on the situation in Estonia reviewed by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights in preparation of its regular report.

The review, in particular, includes a summary of a previously submitted report by the Geneva-based human rights organization Justice pour Tous Internationale (“Justice for All”) on the discriminatory policies pursued by the Estonian authorities toward the canonical Orthodox Church (currently called: the Estonian Orthodox Christian Church).

Human rights advocates pointed out that Estonia’s application of national security legislation under

Article 235 of the Criminal Code raises serious concerns due to the infringement of fundamental rights. Amendments introduced in 2019 expanded this provision by incorporating the vaguely defined concept of “support” for foreign organizations, making it possible to criminalize, among other things, affiliation with canonical religious denominations.

This vagueness has contributed to a lack of transparency in judicial proceedings, which contradicts Articles 9 and 14 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and Article 6 of the European Convention on Human Rights, thereby undermining legality and due process. According to Justice for All, “the legislative framework culminated in the Churches and Congregations (Amendment) Act of 18 June 2025, which prohibited “spiritual ties” with foreign religious authorities deemed as security threats, allowed deregistration of communities without judicial review, and permitted exclusion of clergy on opaque grounds.”

“The historic Church faced leadership expulsion and potential dissolution, all justified under the rubric of national security. In particular, the Estonian Orthodox Christian Church (EOOC) continued to face sustained legislative, administrative, and executive repression. JPTI highlighted the need to address arbitrary detentions and politically motivated prosecutions and to reinforce the integrity of Estonia’s judiciary and its judicial oversight. JPTI urged Estonia to repeal or substantially amend restrictive legislation, restore the autonomy and leadership of the EOCC”

In addition, it is stated that the Russian-speaking minority in Estonia continues to be subjected to systematic marginalization in various spheres, including matters of religious practice. In particular, religious institutions serving Russian-speaking communities have been subjected to persecution.

To fulfill Estonia’s obligations under minority rights instruments, it is necessary to halt the large-scale campaign against the EOCC, including expulsions, refusals to grant residence permits, and exclusion from policy consultations, according to Justice for All. The **report**emphasizes: “Restoration of canonical leadership and the protection of the Church’s autonomy are indispensable to ensuring that religious identity is not subordinated to shifting political calculations.”

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