



## His Holiness Patriarch Kirill sends messages in connection to bill No.8371 considered by Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine



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On October 19, 2023, His Holiness Patriarch Kirill of Moscow and All Rus' sent messages to the Primates of the Local Orthodox Churches, several religious leaders, and leaders and representatives of international organizations. The Primate of the Russian Orthodox Church shared with them his anxiety over the discriminatory bill being considered by the Ukrainian Parliament, Patriarchal press service reports.

On October 19, the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine passed in the first reading bill No. 8371 aimed at the ban of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church. The bill provides for the prohibition through judicial procedures of every religious community on the territory of Ukraine in the instance when it is 'affiliated' with foreign religious organizations.

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His Holiness Patriarch Kirill noted in his message that 'without sufficient clarifying the notion of this 'affiliation,' the afore-mentioned bill empowers the State Service of Ukraine for Ethnic Policy and Freedom of Conscience with the right of judgment on any concrete case. This service is headed by a person hostile towards the Ukrainian Orthodox Church and, being guided by criteria known to nobody, it will carry out the so-called "religious expertise" in cases on which the court will rule. One does not have to be a lawyer to understand that the proposed scenario opens up great possibilities for the most varied wrongdoings.'

'The initiators and supporters of the passing of this bill in Ukraine include top-level government officials,

deputies of the Verkhovna Rada, radical politicians and public figures. They do not hide the fact that the bill is directed against the largest religious community of Ukraine and is aimed at the liquidation of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church as a centralized structure with each of all its dioceses, parishes and monasteries and convents,' His Holiness stated.

'The passing of this bill was preceded by a whole set of measures targeted at the canonical Church in Ukraine, including the slanderous anti-church campaign in the national mass media, seizure of church buildings with the use of brutal violence against clergyman and faithful, the initiation of numerous falsified criminal cases, pressure on bishops from the special services, attempts to seize the cradle of Russian monasticism – the Dormition Kiev Lavra of the Caves and other large monasteries with the forcible eviction of the inmates, as well as a wave of forced closure by local authorities of the church buildings of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church, and the ban on celebrating the divine services and the free use of plots of land upon which are located its monasteries, churches, and shrines,' the Primate of the Russian Church underscored.

According to His Holiness, 'The outlawing of the religious organization uniting many millions of followers, thousands of communities and hundreds of monasteries throughout the country places the Ukrainian state alongside the most horrific theomachist regimes of the past.'

On behalf of the plenitude of the Russian Orthodox Church His Holiness Patriarch Kirill asked the Primates of the Local Orthodox Churches to come out in support of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church and all her faithful children who are afflicted 'on account of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus' (Rev 1:9).

The message of His Holiness Patriarch Kirill of Moscow and All Rus' was sent to the Primates of the Local Orthodox Churches; Pope Francis; Patriarch Tawadros II of the Coptic Church; Archbishop Justin Welby of Canterbury, the head of the Anglican Communion; Catholicos of the East and Malankara Metropolitan Baselios Marthoma Mathew III; Supreme Patriarch and Catholicos of All Armenians Karekin II; Catholicos Aram I of the Great House of Cilicia of the Armenian Apostolic Church; Catholicos-Patriarch Mar Awa III of the Assyrian Church of the East, Maronite Patriarch Bechara Boutros al-Rai of Antioch and All the East; Rev. Dr. Jerry Pillay, General Secretary of the World Council of Churches; and Franklin Graham, President of the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association.

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In his message to the leaders and representative of international organizations His Holiness Patriarch Kirill of Moscow and All Rus' reminded them of the discriminatory character of bill No. 8371. He wrote: 'On March 23, 2023, the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights published a report on the realization of human rights in Ukraine recognizing that the Bill No.8371 could be of discriminatory character for the Ukrainian Orthodox Church. On July 26, Jan Taksyur, a Ukrainian journalist, writer and supporter of the canonical Ukrainian Orthodox Church addressed the special session of the UN Security Council telling about blatant and mass violations of religious freedom in Ukraine.'

'Notwithstanding the established facts of violation of the rights of believers of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church, the Ukrainian authorities continue the policy of liquidating this religious community, thus augmenting the sufferings of millions of the faithful. The bishops and believers are deprived of the right to effective legal defense of their rights under the threat to their life and health posed by religious extremists with the connivance of the authorities.'

'I ask you to take all possible measures to prevent the continuation of mass violations of religious rights of the faithful of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church, including those in the form of discussing the current

situation as part of the agenda of the organization you head, preparing specialized reports, as well as sending special missions for establishing the facts,' wrote His Holiness Patriarch Kirill and expressed his hope that 'measures to prevent lawlessness can be taken before the bill is considered during subsequent readings, enters into force, and starts to be implemented.'

Message to the heads and representatives of international organizations was sent to the Secretary General of the United Nations Antonio 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 Kairat K. Abdrakhmanov, UN Human Rights Council Special Rapporteur on contemporary forms of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance K.P. Ashwini, and UN Human Rights Council Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief Nazila Ghanea.

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