

The OSCE Secretariat bears no responsibility for the content of this document and circulates it without altering its content. The distribution by OSCE Conference Services of this document is without prejudice to OSCE decisions, as set out in documents agreed by OSCE participating States.

PC.DEL/863/19
12 July 2019

ENGLISH
Original: RUSSIAN

Delegation of the Russian Federation

**STATEMENT BY MR. ALEXANDER LUKASHEVICH,
PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION,
AT THE 1235th MEETING OF THE OSCE PERMANENT COUNCIL**

11 July 2019

**On violations by the Ukrainian Government of religious rights and persecution
of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church in Ukraine**

Mr. Chairperson,

Persecution of the faithful and the clergy of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church (UOC) continues in Ukraine. Ukraine's commitments under international law are being violated in a flagrant manner, including its OSCE commitments and the tenets of its national legislation, according to which the State should ensure that all citizens have the right to freedom of religion and should avoid giving preferential treatment to any one religious grouping. We regularly draw this to the attention of the OSCE Permanent Council, but unfortunately the situation continues to deteriorate.

As is well known, the realization of a political project by the former President of Ukraine, Petro Poroshenko, to create a unified "Orthodox Church of Ukraine" (OCU) was the catalyst for these alarming processes. At the same time, the course was set for actually eliminating the largest Orthodox community in the country – the canonical Ukrainian Orthodox Church, which has more than 12,000 parishes.

The change of power in Ukraine gave rise to hope among parishioners and clergy of the UOC that the lawlessness and persecution would cease. The meeting of the elected President of Ukraine, Volodymyr Zelenskyi, with Metropolitan Onufriy, primate of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church, strengthened this hope. Many UOC parishioners from western Ukraine appealed at that time to the new Head of State to protect their churches from "illegal takeover".

Sadly, their hopes have not really been heard. Since 20 May, there have been at least 14 attempts to seize UOC churches by force across Ukraine. Let us recall some of the most offensive examples.

On 11 June, supporters of the new ecclesiastical structure seized the Assumption Church (UOC) in the village of Pohreby (Kyiv region). A security guard employed to protect the church had tear gas sprayed in his face in the process. The police present at the site intervened only once the area around the church had been occupied by supporters of the "new Ukrainian Church". On 20 June in the Rivne region, around a hundred aggressively minded individuals attempted to appropriate a house owned by the Church, where the family, including minor children, of the abbot of the Church of St. Peter and St. Paul (UOC) that had been

seized in April of this year, were registered at and were living. One of the female parishioners of the canonical Church had her nose broken, another sustained a concussion, and a third received a hard punch to the stomach. During the attack, the building's windows were smashed and doors kicked in. On 30 June in the Vinnytsia region, local supporters of the so-called OCU, along with some who had travelled in from outside the area, once again attempted to seize the Transfiguration Church (UOC). In the course of this incident, members of the UOC were kicked and some were seriously injured.

Acts of vandalism against churches belonging to the Ukrainian Orthodox Church continue unabated. More than eight incidents have been recorded since 20 May. For example, in early July in the Kyiv region, a church (UOC) under construction in honour of St. Sophronius the Bishop of Irkutsk was ransacked. On 25 June in the Odessa region, there was an attempted arson attack on the church (UOC) in honour of the icon of the Mother of God "the Healer" in the grounds of a municipal hospital. The list of such incidents could go on and on.

People who have remained true to their religious community are subjected to discrimination and persecution in Ukraine. Not even children are spared. On 31 May in the Chernivtsi region, a commission established by the head of the local administration called for teachers and tutors to be deprived of their parental rights if they were to take their children to the church (UOC) in the village of Vaslovivtsi. At the end of June, the same commission submitted an application to the police demanding that the family of the church warden of the Assumption Church (UOC) be deprived of their parental rights. What is this if not blackmail and pressure on believers? It recently came to light that there is a persistent campaign by teachers against schoolchildren who are parishioners of the UOC in the Rivne and Chernivtsi regions. These are just a few cases in which people were not afraid to speak out. In reality, there are many more such outrageous examples.

Mr. Chairperson,

What is happening in Ukraine is not in line with the Ukrainian Government's declared commitment to democratic standards and its international obligations, particularly its OSCE commitments.

The actions of the Ukrainian authorities directly violate the provisions of the Constitution of Ukraine, in particular Article 24, which stipulates – and I quote – that: "There shall be no privileges or restrictions based on race, colour of skin, political, religious and other beliefs". Article 35 of the Constitution of Ukraine, incidentally, is not being observed either. It states that: "Everyone has the right to freedom of personal philosophy and religion. This right includes the freedom to profess or not to profess any religion, to perform alone or collectively and without constraint religious rites and ceremonial rituals, and to conduct religious activity."

OSCE commitments are being flouted, among them the provisions of the Helsinki Final Act (1975), the CSCE Vienna Concluding Document (1989) and also Maastricht Ministerial Council Decision No. 4/03 on tolerance and non-discrimination. In accordance with these documents, States "condemn all discrimination and violence, including against any religious group or individual believer", "commit to ensure and facilitate the freedom of the individual to profess and practice a religion or belief, alone or in community with others", and also to "take effective measures to prevent and eliminate discrimination against individuals or communities on the grounds of religion or belief".

Under these conditions it is necessary to ensure that the Ukrainian Government stops persecution on religious grounds and observes its existing commitments. We urge the relevant OSCE structures and participating States to give an objective assessment of the Ukrainian Government's actions. We trust that the

OSCE Special Monitoring Mission to Ukraine will continue to pay close attention to the situation surrounding the Ukrainian Orthodox Church.

Thank you for your attention.