



**Permanent Mission of Ukraine**  
to the International  
Organizations in Vienna

## **Statement on Russia's attack on the freedom of religion and belief in the temporarily occupied territories of Ukraine**

As delivered by Ambassador Yevhenii Tsymbaliuk,  
Permanent Representative of Ukraine to the International Organizations in Vienna,  
to the 1235<sup>th</sup> meeting of the Permanent Council,  
11 July 2019

**Mr. Chairperson,**

The Constitution of Ukraine provides for the separation of church and state and my government is not interfering and will not interfere in the affairs of the religious organizations. Moreover, the Government of Ukraine promotes fulfillment of freedom of religion and belief, as is the case in other democratic OSCE states.

**Distinguished colleagues,**

The delegation of Ukraine repeatedly responded in earlier meetings of the Permanent Council to Russian allegations concerning freedom of religion and belief in Ukraine. Such allegations and often accusations produced in large volumes by the Russian Federation are unfounded.

We also reiterate that we will not allow the interference in Ukraine's religious life of the neighboring State, which continues its aggression. It has incorporated the national Russian Orthodox Church into its governmental establishment and uses it as a hybrid warfare instrument against Ukraine.

We recall in this regard, in particular, that on 12 October 2018 the President of Russia convened the National Security Council to discuss, according to official Kremlin's information, "the situation for the Russian Orthodox Church in Ukraine after the decision of the Synod of the Patriarchate of Constantinople to proceed to granting autocephaly to the Church of Ukraine". When Kremlin speaks about the "Russian Orthodox Church in Ukraine" and when the Russian delegation in the Permanent Council speaks about the "Ukrainian Orthodox Church" – they speak about the same religious organization.

**Mr. Chairperson,**

As for the exercise of freedom of religion and belief in Ukraine, including the situation for the Ukrainian Orthodox Church, this freedom is under severe attack in territories of Ukraine illegally occupied by the Russian Federation – the Autonomous Republic of Crimea, city of Sevastopol and parts of Donbas.

Last December the Ukrainian delegation brought it to the attention of the Permanent Council that the Russian occupation authorities in Luhansk reportedly denied

so-called “registration” to all Baptist, Pentecostal, Seventh Day Adventist, and other Protestant churches. The aim was to effectively ban all activities by these religious groups, and now their members can face even illegal detention for gathering to pray in private homes. This situation remains troublesome.

Two months ago, we called upon the SMM on the follow-up on reports about the search of the Holy Trinity Cathedral of the Orthodox Church of Ukraine in the city of Luhansk by the Russian armed formations. Belongings of the church were confiscated and its representatives were locked for 4.5-hour long “interviews”. We strongly condemned those repressive actions of the Russian side violating the freedom of religion or belief and encouraged the SMM to continue implementing this part of its monitoring mandate.

We also informed you that in the occupied parts of the Donetsk region the religious communities have been demanded to register according to the so-called new “laws” issued by the illegal entities of the Russian occupation administration.

These is real risk that 36 churches and premises, including the diocesan House of Mercy, belonging to the communities of the Orthodox Church of Ukraine in temporarily occupied parts of Donetsk region, may be “confiscated” and their priests will be expelled from these territories.

We will continue to rely on the SMM and its ground presence in the Russia-occupied parts of Donbas to provide information on the most pressing cases of violation of the human rights and fundamental freedoms by the Russian occupation forces, in full compliance with the Mission’s mandate. In particular, we expect the Mission to check the latest reports of 25 April on the decision of the Russian armed formations to confiscate the church of the Orthodox Church of Ukraine in the village of Kuznetsovo-Mykhailivka in the occupied part of Donetsk region and to transfer its ownership to the Russian Orthodox Church in Ukraine.

The Ukrainian delegation informed the Permanent Council that in Simferopol, in the illegally occupied Crimea, the Russian occupants ordered the Cathedral of the Orthodox Church of Ukraine to leave the premises. This order of the occupation administration aims at terminating the presence of the Orthodox Church of Ukraine in the peninsula and the religious life of its remaining eight parishes.

Last week we called upon the Special Monitoring Mission of Ukraine to verify the most recent reports on the physical dissolution as of 28 June of the Crimean Eparchy’s Directorate of the Orthodox Church of Ukraine following its expulsion by the Russian occupants from the main UOC Cathedral in the city of Simferopol.

We note that until now the SMM has not informed about the mentioned illegitimate demands of the Russian occupation authorities in Crimea and Donbas. We request the SMM to immediately follow up on this information and keep it under constant monitoring. We also request the Slovak OSCE Chairmanship as well as the OSCE ODIHR to duly react to these latest developments of violation of OSCE principles and commitments.

We urge Russia to put an end to the repressive policies of its occupation administrations in Crimea and parts of Donbas and abide by OSCE commitments regarding the freedom of religion or belief. We also urge Russia, as the occupying power, to abide by the applicable norms of international humanitarian law.

**Thank you, Mr. Chairperson.**