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**STATEMENT BY
MR. DMITRY POLYANSKIY, PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF THE
RUSSIAN FEDERATION, AT THE 1577th MEETING OF THE
OSCE PERMANENT COUNCIL**

17 September 2026

On the Kyiv regime's ongoing violations of freedom of religion

Mr. Chairperson,

We are compelled to address once again the ever-intensifying repression of canonical Orthodoxy in Ukraine. The targeted and legislatively framed campaign to liquidate the Ukrainian Orthodox Church (UOC) continues. This cynical policy of the Kyiv regime is accompanied by the seizure of churches, criminal terror, revocation of citizenship, unlawful conscription, and physical assaults and murders of clergy and parishioners.

The scale of what is happening moved beyond isolated incidents long ago. Persecution based on religion has not merely intensified – it has now become quite systematic.

Starting in 2014, the Kyiv regime gradually built up a punitive “mechanism” to suppress religious freedom. The overt dismantling of the UOC began after February 2022. The apogee of arbitrariness was reached in August 2024 with the adoption of that odious law entitled the Act on Protection of the Constitutional Order in Regard to the Activities of Religious Organizations. In essence, a legal tool was created to ban the UOC, dissolve its structures and confiscate its property.

The figures speak for themselves. According to the latest figures from the Ukrainian Security Service for 2025 alone, more than 200 criminal cases have been opened against representatives of the UOC, including 27 cases against bishops. Forty guilty verdicts were handed down. Nineteen clergymen, including the Primate of the UOC, Metropolitan Onufriy, have been stripped of their Ukrainian citizenship.

Since 2022, over a thousand searches have been carried out in dioceses, monasteries and churches. According to various estimates, between 1,500 and 2,000 churches belonging to the UOC have been seized. Between 2022 and early 2026, nearly 1,400 parishes were transferred to the schismatic so-called Orthodox Church of Ukraine (OCU). This is achieved through sham meetings, pressure from local authorities, and interference by radicals, the police and the Ukrainian Security Service.

Significantly, the OCU is primarily made up of individuals whom the UOC had previously deemed unfit to work with people owing to misconduct on their part that was incompatible with the duties of a clergyman. Most of them collaborate closely with neo-Nazi paramilitary formations.

The illegal conscription of UOC clergy is a particularly cynical move. In June 2025, the authorities published a list of religious organizations whose clergy are exempt from mobilization, leaving out several thousand congregations. Inclusion on the list was made subject to the completion of a “check for affiliation” with the Russian Orthodox Church. In this way, the Kyiv regime simply began to get rid of priests whom it regarded as undesirable – that is, by sending them to the front as cannon fodder. Fathers of large families have reportedly been conscripted, as have individuals with serious health conditions.

During the forced mobilization, UOC clergy are subjected to pressure by the military enlistment officers: their mobile phones are confiscated; they are beaten and deprived of food and drink; money is extorted from them. Documents presented to apply for a legal deferment (for example, where a clergyman is disabled, has a large family or has incapacitated dependants) are ignored or even destroyed by the military enlistment officers.

The consequences of this policy are tragic. The true extent of the Kyiv regime’s crimes against members of the clergy has yet to be established.

Violence during the seizure of churches has become par for the course. For example, in October 2024, militants, with the involvement of the security forces, stormed St. Michael’s Cathedral in Cherkasy. The attack went on for hours. Metropolitan Theodosius sustained a brain concussion along with corneal and skin burns. Dozens of laypersons were injured; some were admitted to hospital. The cathedral was ransacked. Later, Metropolitan Theodosius had to be taken to hospital once again. In Ivano-Frankivsk, tear gas was used during the storming of the metropolitan cathedral, and members of the clergy suffered burns. In Pyrohivtsi, Archpriest Alexander Kravets was thrown down the steps and kicked; a female parishioner had her head slammed against a wall until she lost consciousness. In Fastiv, Rynhach, Irpin, Kremenchuk, Chernivtsi, Volodymyr-Volynskyi and many other cities and towns, the pattern is the same: doors smashed in, beatings, death threats.

Back in March 2022, in the Zhytomyr region, Archimandrite Laurus was assaulted in public and then abducted. His fate remains unknown. There is no legal censure for such disappearances, physical assaults and humiliating treatment of priests. The police often refuse to record such crimes. The perpetrators go unpunished.

Take, for instance, the high-profile case of the murder of the monk Varsonofii at the UOC’s Sviatohirsk Lavra in August 2026. Two parishioners were also injured in the attack. Those responsible have still not been brought to justice.

Major holy sites have also come under attack. There have been searches in the Kyiv Pechersk Lavra (Kyiv Monastery of the Caves), and the monastic community continues to be pressured to leave. On 15 June 2026, the Lavra was damaged by a Ukrainian air defence missile falling to the ground. In the Sviatohirsk Lavra, Metropolitan Arseniy has been arrested and detained. The Pochaiv Lavra has been subjected to searches and attempted unlawful re-registration.

The attempts by certain media outlets to report on the pressure being exerted on the UOC and the discrimination faced by its congregations are being harshly put down by the Ukrainian intelligence services. Since 2024, 14 journalists who work for Ukraine’s largest Orthodox media outlet, the Union of Orthodox Journalists, have been under investigation and facing trial. The charges brought against them relate to

political offences, namely “high treason in wartime”, “collaboration”, “creation of and participation in a criminal organization”, “incitement to religious hatred by an organized group”, “justification of armed aggression” and so on. However, in reality, they are being prosecuted for their professional activities – that is, for their objective reporting on the forcible seizures of UOC churches, the discriminatory nature of the laws enacted against the UOC and other measures designed to exert pressure on it.

Against this backdrop, representatives of Western countries talk pompously and cynically about freedom of religion, tolerance, the protection of ethnic minorities and combating manifestations of hatred. This begs the question as to whether fundamental international human rights instruments, the Helsinki Final Act and the OSCE commitments of States do not apply to the millions of Orthodox believers belonging to the UOC. Why do the “champions of freedoms” in this room remain silent? But, alas, it is a rhetorical question, for all the West’s thoughts and actions are geared towards the goal of inflicting a strategic defeat on Russia. To that end, the Kyiv regime’s sponsors are prepared to turn a blind eye even to the most appalling crimes committed by the Ukrainian authorities.

Nevertheless, the truth cannot be hidden, however unflattering it may be for the Kyiv regime and its sponsors. It is precisely to spread the truth that the Russian Foreign Ministry has been issuing reports on the Kyiv regime’s unlawful actions targeting the Ukrainian Orthodox Church and its clergy and parishioners, and on the glorification of Nazism and the spread of neo-Nazism – reports that we have circulated at the OSCE. We urge everyone to read these documents carefully and draw their own conclusions, which are quite self-evident.

We expect the OSCE executive structures and the Personal Representative of the Swiss Chairmanship, Dr. Wolfgang Palaver, to give an appropriate response to all the crimes committed against UOC clergy and parishioners. We have sent respective requests to them.

Thank you for your attention.