



25.07.2023 23:06

№

REPORT of the Foreign Ministry of the Russian Federation «Illegal actions by the Kiev regime targeting the Ukrainian Orthodox Church (UOC), its clergy and parishioners»

REPORT

of the Foreign Ministry of the Russian Federation

Illegal actions by the Kiev regime
targeting the Ukrainian Orthodox Church (UOC),
its clergy and parishioners

Moscow

2023

Contents

Introduction

1. Ukraine's discriminatory laws and draft laws targeting the Ukrainian Orthodox Church (as of June 16, 2023)

2. Actions by Ukrainian security services and law enforcement agencies against the UOC (as of June 16, 2023)

3. Actions by Ukrainian local authorities and self-government bodies against the UOC (as of June 16, 2023)

4: Seizing of UOC churches and illegal re-registration of parishes (as of June 16, 2023)

5: Pressure exerted by national and regional authorities on major UOC monasteries (as of June 16, 2023)

6: Hate speech, unprovoked aggression and violence against the UOC clergy and believers (as of June 16, 2023)

7. Response by certain international human rights organisations

Introduction

For many years, the Kiev authorities have been pursuing a policy of liquidating the canonical Ukrainian Orthodox Church (UOC) in Ukraine, discriminating against its clergy, and persecuting clergymen and believers. The country's legislative system and the actions of various law enforcement agencies are designed to fulfill this goal.

The events unfolding in Ukraine contribute to the overall picture of a systemic crisis in world Orthodoxy caused by the policies of the Patriarchate of Constantinople, the United States and other Western countries, which encourage the schismatics to do what they are doing. The Kiev authorities and the West are trying to drive a wedge between the Russian and Ukrainian peoples, to destroy the spiritual affinity of Orthodox believers in the two countries, even despite the Ukrainian Orthodox Church's decision to become independent from the Moscow Patriarchate. It is not surprising that the former Ukrainian authorities also took various steps against the canonical Church. Isolated evidence of the crackdown on UOC clergy and believers was put on record in 2014 and even earlier. Full-scale system-wide pressure on canonical Orthodoxy in Ukraine began in 2018 and intensified in 2022-2023. It was spearheaded by the central authorities of Ukraine (president, government, and National Security and Defence Council) and is currently being implemented through legislation, the activities of the intelligence services, regional authorities and institutions of self-rule. Moreover, in 2019, the schismatic Orthodox Church of Ukraine (OCU) was created as a counterbalance to the canonical UOC. That same year, in violation of canon law, Patriarch Bartholomew of Constantinople granted autocephalous status to it.

To liquidate the UOC, a legislative framework has been created and is in the process of being expanded. Thus, on December 1, 2022, the National Security and Defence Council of Ukraine (NSDC) adopted a decision, the actual purpose of which is to totally restrict the rights of UOC communities. The decision approved a number of measures, such as:

- developing in the Cabinet of Ministers a draft law to ban the UOC;
- ratcheting up pressure on it by Ukrainian special services;
- depriving it of the right to use the churches of the Kiev-Pechersk Lavra which is Ukraine's most ancient and largest monastery;
- imposing "sanctions" on its bishops.

The decision was approved by President Zelensky's executive order of December 1, 2022. His executive orders of December 11 and 20, 2022 approved a list of “sanctions” on 14 UOC bishops. “Sanctions” mean a ban on economic activities of an individual and actual seizure of their property in Ukraine.

Also, Zelensky’s direct executive order revoked Ukrainian citizenship of 12 UOC bishops in 2022, and it is proposed to forcibly expel them from the country in violation of the Constitution of Ukraine, which prohibits revocation of citizenship or expulsion of citizens from Ukraine (Art. 25).

SBU Chairman Vasily Malyuk said in an interview with Interfax-Ukraine on April 21, 2023 that 19 representatives of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church have seen their Ukrainian citizenship revoked in 2022-2023.

In addition, the Kiev regime’s efforts include drafting discriminatory laws, forceful seizures of churches and monasteries, illegal re-registration of communities, encouragement of hate speech, unmotivated aggression and violence against the UOC clergy and believers.

On a separate note, multilateral universal organisations have for the most part remained blind and deaf to the facts of the Kiev regime persecuting the canonical UOC. In a broader sense, they also turn a blind eye to a significant array of information and reports about widespread human rights violations in Ukraine. In fact, international entities, including the ones enjoying the greatest credibility, such as the UN and its leadership, have not so far unequivocally condemned violations by the Kiev regime of its international legal obligations in the sphere of human rights and the crimes it has committed, in effect sending to Kiev signals of total impunity. Some of the criticisms are even withdrawn and edited by their authors, as was the case with the Amnesty International report, or are simply ignored by Ukraine. For example, in November 2021, the Human Rights Committee, a supervisory body established under the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) adopted concluding observations on Ukraine's most recent report on the fulfillment of its obligations under the ICCPR, in which it expressed concern at reports of violations of the rights of the UOC believers. In particular, it noted: “The Committee is concerned about reports of violence, intimidation and vandalism with regard to places of worship in connection with the process of transitioning churches and religious communities from the UOC to the newly established Orthodox Church of Ukraine. The Committee is also concerned about reported police inaction during such incidents and the lack of information about investigations carried out by a participating state”. Kiev ignored these observations by the committee.

This report is divided into seven sections and presents facts and circumstances gathered from various sources that show the full extent of political lawlessness in that country and legal outrage against the UOC, the gross systematic violation of the rights of Orthodox Christians by the Kiev regime, and the reactions of some international human rights organisations.

1. Ukraine's discriminatory laws and draft laws targeting the Ukrainian Orthodox Church (as of June 16, 2023)

As of June 16, 2023, the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine registered nine discriminatory draft laws targeting the Ukrainian Orthodox Church (UOC) in one way or another. Their initiators have made no secret of their intention to infringe upon the rights of the UOC's communities and believers, confiscate the property belonging to this religious denomination, deprive it of its historical name, which it has been using as a legal entity, ban it from calling itself an Orthodox church and, finally, impair them in their ability to operate on Ukrainian territory.

In keeping with a December 1, 2022, Executive Order by President Vladimir Zelensky, Prime Minister Denis Shmygal, on behalf of the Ukrainian Government, submitted Draft Law No. 8371 dated January 19, 2022, titled "Amending certain laws of Ukraine regarding the operation of religious organisations in Ukraine." It sets forth provisions designed "to prevent religious organisations affiliated with the centres of influence of a religious organisation (association), whose control centre (administration) is located outside Ukraine in a state that is carrying out an armed aggression against Ukraine." The draft law also broadens the authority of the State Service of Ukraine for Ethnic Policy and Freedom of Conscience by enabling it to designate religious organisations as falling within the purview of this law and initiate their prohibition.

Draft laws No. 7204 dated March 22, 2022, titled "Banning the Moscow Patriarchate on the territory of Ukraine" and No. 7213 dated March 26, 2022, titled "Amending Ukraine's Freedom of Conscience and Religious Organisations Laws to ban religious organisations...", also provide for completely banning the UOC, nationalising its property and forcefully liquidating all its communities, as well as confiscating its monasteries and stepping up pressure against it by the Ukrainian security services.

Andrey Bogdanets, a Verkhovna Rada MP representing the Servant of the People majority party, submitted a draft resolution dated September 8, 2022, titled "Appeal by the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine to the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine regarding the granting of free use to the Orthodox Church of Ukraine of

the Pochayev Lavra and the Kiev-Pechersk Lavra building complexes.” It provides for expropriating the buildings forming the Pochayev Lavra and the Kiev-Pechersk Lavra – the two biggest monasteries of the UOC.

Petr Poroshenko’s party, European Solidarity, initiated Draft Law No. 8221 dated November 23, 2022, titled “Strengthening national security in terms of the freedom of conscience and the operation of religious organisations.” It wrongfully refers to the UOC as the Russian Orthodox Church and contains an outright ban on the UOC’s activity and organisations under its canonical jurisdiction on the territory of Ukraine. The law bans UOC communities from using the word “Orthodox” in their designations unless they join the new religious denomination established by the state and receive its approval to this effect.

Draft Law No. 8262 dated December 5, 2022, “Amending certain legislative acts of Ukraine to streamline regulations pertaining to activities by religious organisations” makes it easier to illegally seize UOC communities and their churches, while also making it illegal for UOC communities to lease state and municipal property.

Verkhovna Rada MPs Nikita Poturayev from the Servant of the People majority party, Nikolay Knyazhitsky and Rostislav Pavlenko from Poroshenko’s European Solidarity party, as well as several other MPs, submitted a draft resolution to the Verkhovna Rada dated April 3, 2023, titled “Appeal by the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine to the Cabinet of Ministers to terminate the lease of the Pochayev Dormition Lavra complex of buildings with the Moscow Patriarchate’s Ukrainian Orthodox Church.”

Apart from these recent legislative initiatives, the discriminatory laws adopted by the Poroshenko regime in 2018 and 2019 against the UOC remain in full force and effect.

These include Law No. 2662-VIII dated December 20, 2018, “Amending Article 12 of Ukraine’s Freedom of Conscience and Religious Organisations Law regarding the naming of religious organisations (associations) that pertain to (are part of) a religious organisation (association) whose control centre (administration) is located outside of Ukraine in a state which has been recognised by law as carrying out an armed aggression against Ukraine and/or temporarily occupying part of its territory.” This law establishes an obligation for UOC communities to “reflect their affiliation with a religious organisation... located outside of Ukraine in their unabbreviated names,” which means including in their names “the full legal name” of the Russian Orthodox Church “and possibly adding ‘in Ukraine’ to this designation.” This law de facto

prevents the UOC from using the word ‘Ukrainian’ in its name even though it is the oldest active Orthodox religious organisation in Ukraine uniting millions of Ukrainian citizens. In addition to this, this law contains discriminatory “restrictions regarding the ability by clerics, religious missionaries and mentors” from the UOC to access “the units and formations of the Armed Forces of Ukraine and other army units of Ukraine,” as well as “other restrictions.” It stipulates that the charter of a religious community “becomes null and void in its provisions establishing the full official name of a religious organisation” unless it makes the corresponding amendments.

In 2019, the Ministry of Culture issued a directive to publish a list containing thousands of UOC religious organisations (dioceses, monasteries, and synodal institutions) instituting an obligation for them to change their names by April 26, 2019. The Kiev City District Administrative Court granted interim relief by suspending the directive while it reviewed the UOC’s lawsuit against the Ministry of Culture. However, when the case was referred to the Kiev City District Administrative Court in May 2023, it spent six days reviewing the lawsuit and went on to dismiss it on May 15.

The UOC’s legal department believed that resuming the hearing on this case was tantamount to an “attempt to use the court to lift the existing ban on amending the registry and changing the name and to adopt a draft law that would pave the way to re-registering as part of the OCU not only religious communities, but also other UOC institutions.” On June 14, the UOC Kiev Metropolis filed an appeal with the 6th Appellate Administrative Court.

Forcing communities belonging to the canonical Orthodox church to change their names would not only deprive them of their historical designations, but could also enable the Ministry of Culture to use the obligation to re-register these multiple entities and then refuse to approve it as way to put pressure on the UOC. Depriving these communities of their legal status would result in their de facto liquidation and seizure of their property by the authorities.

Law No. 2673-VIII dated January 17, 2019, “Amending certain laws of Ukraine regarding the allegiance of religious organisations and state registration procedures for religious organisations with the status of a legal entity” changed the procedure for registering religious organisations by setting forth procedures for joining another denomination and creating an obligation to re-register as per these requirements.

Under this law, two thirds of the members belonging to a religious community can decide on “changing the allegiance” of a religious organisation, which means joining a different denomination or a church jurisdiction. However,

the law fails to spell out in clear and specific legal terms who can be viewed as a community member by saying that “membership in a religious community is based on the principles of the free expression of will, as well as the requirements contained in the charter (regulations) of a religious community.”

So far, as a rule Ukraine’s major Christian denominations did not have any specific legal terms to determine whether believers (parishioners) belonged to a specific religious community, considering that there are so many of them. Local authorities can use the vague legal language from this law to seize UOC churches in the following manner:

- A sham vote by a secular territorial community in a given area, be it a city or a village, can be presented as a vote by a religious community. Quite often most of the local residents are absent during these votes while people belonging to other denominations or complete strangers show up, or these votes take the form of collecting signatures when verifying their authenticity is impossible. In some cases, the authorities prevented the UOC believers and clerics from attending these would-be referendums held by territorial communities.
- The outcome of this sham vote is then presented as a resolution by a UOC religious community, while ignoring the resolution adopted by a meeting of parishioners of the actual religious community to define a membership status and express their unwillingness to join the OCU. The amendments the true community makes to its constituent document are not registered.
- After that, the head of the regional government issues a directive ordering the UOC community as a legal entity to be re-registered as a new OCU community thereby liquidating the UOC community. Supported by the local authorities, the OCU adepts break into the church and hand it over to their religious community, while any attempt by UOC believers to voice their protests or resist these takeovers are suppressed by force with the involvement of police officers and radical organisations. Law enforcement agencies refuse to respond to acts of violence or other offences and undermine any attempt to carry out a pre-trial investigation.

Law No. 2673-VIII also sets forth several norms introducing illegal barriers and complicating registration procedures for religious organisations, which runs counter to the applicable Ukrainian laws and the Guidelines on the Legal Status of Religious or Belief Communities (OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights, 2015). This enables the authorities to arbitrarily delay the registration or re-registration of UOC’s religious communities and facilitate church takeovers, as well as to pressure those of them who refuse to do it.

2. Actions by Ukrainian security services and law enforcement agencies against the UOC (as of June 16, 2023)

In the period from May to December 2022, the Security Service of Ukraine conducted massive unauthorised searches in the UOC dioceses, monasteries and communities in cooperation with other law-enforcement agencies under the pretext of “counterintelligence measures” on the entire territory of Ukraine.

- In May 2022, the Press Service of the Svyatogorsk Lavra announced that during the period of hostilities on its outskirts, the church was visited by a group of people in military uniforms from Ukraine’s security agencies. Without presenting any documents, they conducted unauthorised searches, threatened monks and nuns, insulted them and demanded that they transfer to the OCU. Complaints to the police and the SBU remained unanswered.
- On October 23, the National Police of Ukraine reported inspections (unauthorised searches) conducted together with the SBU in the Pochayev Lavra and the churches of a number of residential areas in the Ternopol Region. The police announced its intention to conduct such inspections regularly.
- On November 22, the SBU reported “the conduct of counterintelligence operations” on the territory of the Kiev-Pechersk Lavra “as part of the SBU’s systemic work on countering the subversive activity of Russian security services in Ukraine.” A search and identity check were performed at the UOC Kiev Zverinets Monastery. It is revealing that it was surrounded by three police cordons and specialists with service dogs.
- On November 22, the SBU organised “counterintelligence measures” in the Rovno Region – on the territory of the diocesan administration of the Diocese of Sarna, in the Korets Convent and the Volyn Icon of the Mother of God Convent in the village of Serniki, Zarechnensky District.
- On November 25, the SBU announced the conduct of “counterintelligence measures” in the administration and Cathedral of the UOC Chernovtsy and Bukovina Diocese. According to Metropolitan Melety of Chernovtsy and Bukovina, a search was carried out with numerous procedural violations (absence of witnesses, denial of access to a lawyer, etc); all digital media, computers and mobile telephones were confiscated; SBU employees fabricated or planted some “evidence” during the search. The victims of the search were compelled to undress and were photographed. Later, their photos were posted on social media with insulting comments and slanderous accusations.
- On November 26, the SBU conducted a search of the premises of the Pochayev Seminary Rector Archbishop Job of Shumsk, and on November 27, it searched the administration and the Cathedral of the UOC Ivano-Frankovsk Diocese.

- On November 30, the SBU searched the Cyril and Methodius Convent of the UOC Mukachevo Diocese in the village of Drachino in the Mukachevo District of the Transcarpathian Region.
- On December 7, the SBU announced searches at UOC facilities in the Cherkassy, Volyn and Kherson regions. It mentioned the Chartoryisky and Miletsky monasteries of the Vladimir-Volyn Diocese; the Cathedral of the Cherkassy Diocese; the administration of the Uman Diocese; the St. George's Convent in the village of Kocherzhinty in the Cherkassy Region (Uman Diocese), St Andrew's Church and the Church of St Sophronius of Irkutsk in Cherkassy; the Trinity Motroninsky Convent (Cherkassy Diocese); the Krasnogorsk Intercession Convent (Cherkassy Diocese) and the Kanev Assumption Cathedral (Cherkassy Diocese).
- On December 5, the SBU reported searches in the UOC Poltava and Kremenchug dioceses (Poltava Region). It also mentioned the building of the administration of the Kremenchug Diocese and the Mgar Holy Transfiguration Monastery of the Poltava Diocese.
- On December 8, the SBU reported the adoption of "security measures" at the monasteries of the Chopovichi Urban District in the Zhitomir Region;
- On December 9, the SBU announced the conduct of "counterintelligence measures" at the Intercession Cathedral of the Borispol Diocese and its administration.
- In the period from December 10 to 20, the SBU announced that "counterintelligence measures" (searches) were being arranged at the UOC dioceses and monasteries in the Kharkov, Lvov, Transcarpathian, Chernovtsy, Rovno, Volyn, Nikolayev, Sumy, Lvov, Zhitomir, Kherson and Odessa regions, including in the Annunciation Cathedral of the Kharkov Diocese; the Intercession Monastery in Kharkov; several churches of the Kharkov Diocese in Kharkov and the Kharkov Region; the Ascension Cathedral of the Izyum Diocese; the St George's Cathedral of the UOC Lvov Diocese; the Holy Trinity Church in Lvov; the Church of the Intercession in Borislav, Lvov Region; the Holy Cross Cathedral of the Mukachevo Diocese in Uzhgorod; the Assumption Convent at the Holy Mountain near the village of Zimne; the Holy Spirit Cathedral of the Romny Diocese; the Nativity Church of the Ovruch Diocese in Korosten; the Transfiguration Cathedral an administration of the Ovruch Diocese; the Church of Our Lady of Kazan of the Kherson Diocese in the town of Chernobayevka; and the St Theodosius Monastery in Balta and the administration of the Balta Diocese.
- On December 29, the SBU announced "counterintelligence measures" at "UOC facilities" in the Krivoy Rog Region, including the administration of the Krivoy Rog Diocese; the Transfiguration Cathedral in Krivoy Rog; the St Vladimir Monastery in Krivoy Rog; and the churches of St Nicholas and the Iveron Icon of the Theotokos in Krivoy Rog. The SBU also reported searches in the

Khmelnitsky Region: in the administration of the Shepetovka Diocese and the St Michael's Cathedral in Shepetovka; the Nativity of the Theotokos Monastery in the village of Gorodishche, Shepetovka District; the St Anna Convent in Slavuta; the Nativity of the Theotokos Church in Slavuta; the Church of the Holy Martyrs Vera, Nadezhda, Lyubov and their Mother Sophia in Shepetovka; the Cathedral of the Unburnt Bush Icon of the Theotokos in Netishin; and the Resurrection Church in the town of Vinkovtsy.

- On January 6, 2023, the SBU announced “counterterrorist measures at the UOC facilities” in the Kherson, Kirovograd, Dnepropetrovsk and Rovno regions, including the Church of St John of Kronstadt, Kherson Diocese; the Holy Trinity Monastery in Mezhirich, Rovno Diocese; and the administration of the Dnepropetrovsk Diocese. The searches allegedly unearthed “libraries of pro-Kremlin literature,” “propaganda leaflets” and “pro-Russian symbols.”

Despite the mass searches of all UOC dioceses, the “evidence” presented to the public was reduced to theological, liturgical and historical literature in the Russian language and fake “propaganda leaflets.” In some instances, these fake materials were planted in the presence of the victims.

- On October 12, the SBU and police departments of the Vinnitsa Region conducted searches in the residence of Metropolitan Ionafan of Tulchin and Bratslav and in the administration of the Tulchin Diocese, following which they demonstrated blatantly crude leaflets and booklets of a political nature in support of Russia and the Russian army and with anti-Ukrainian statements. Metropolitan Ionafan refuted the accusations and pointed out violations of search procedure.
- On November 23, following a search in the Korets Convent, the SBU presented leaflets that it allegedly discovered with quotes from Patriarch Kirill's prayers, divorced from their original context, and provocatively grouped so that they made a call for Ukraine's sovereignty to be renounced. According to witnesses, “the leaflets were allegedly found in the cold and damp attic. Everything stored there – books and papers – gets water-damaged and mouldy, whereas these leaflets were brand new and dry.”
- Father Superior of the Uzhgorod Cathedral Dmitry Sidor reported the details of a search the SBU conducted in December 2022, allegedly because the cathedral was mined. The search did not produce any evidence, and the SBU promised to mention this fact in the protocol. However, an SBU officer showed the dean a clipping from an old newspaper, a political article with some phrases that had been underlined. The SBU also declared that two books published in Moscow and St Petersburg and several books denouncing the Ukrainian autocephaly published in Greece were “illegal”.
- Metropolitan Anthony of Borispol and Brovary, chancellor of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church, pointed out in a 2022 report that searches were conducted

“in the eparchial offices, temples and monasteries of our Church, as well as in the homes of bishops and clergymen, resulting in the appearance of leaflets that have never existed, or symbols that can discredit the religious organisation.”

Following these illegal actions, criminal cases were opened against UOC diocese officials and clergymen on fake political pretences. SBU head Vasily Malyuk told Interfax Ukraine on April 21, 2023, that 61 such criminal cases were initiated and seven verdicts were delivered in 2022-2023.

- In November 2022, the SBU charged Metropolitan Ionafan of Tulchin and Bratslav with “inciting religious strife” and “justifying... the armed aggression of the Russian Federation.” On June 5, the case was turned over to the Vinnitsa City Court after all the judges of the district court recused themselves. Metropolitan Ionafan was charged with “activities aimed at violent destabilisation of the government or overthrow of the existing constitutional regime,” “infringement on the territorial integrity of Ukraine,” “justification of the armed aggression of the Russian Federation,” and “violating the religious equality of citizens.”
- On December 9, the SBU made public the charges of suspicion against the Pochayev Seminary Rector under Article 161 of the Criminal Code of Ukraine (Violation of citizens' equality based on their race, ethnicity or religious beliefs). Archbishop Job cooperated with the investigation and was fined by the Kremenets District Court for inciting religious strife.
- In January 2023, Metropolitan Joasaph of Kirovograd and Novomirgorod and secretary of the Kirovograd Diocese Archpriest Roman Kondratyuk were charged with suspicion under the article on the violation of citizens' equality because of their religious beliefs for publishing theological and historical literature against religious schism. They were placed on house arrest for a year. In May 2023, Metropolitan Joasaph (Guben) and Archpriest Roman Kondratyuk were sentenced to three years in prison with a two-year probation term on charges of inciting religious strife. They are not allowed to hold executive positions for a year. They admitted their guilt to make a plea bargain.
- On February 20, Metropolitan Theodosius of Cherkassy and Kanev became a suspect under Article 161 (violation of citizens' equality based on their religious beliefs) after a link to the Moscow Patriarchate was published on the website of the diocese. On April 12, the Sosnovsky District Court of Cherkassy sentenced him to house arrest with electronic tagging. The petitions filed by over 1,500 believers of the diocese were disregarded. On June 2, the metropolitan's house arrest was extended by two months; a plea to limit the house arrest to nighttime was denied. Metropolitan Theodosius stated that the case against him was “framed up” for political reasons. He said that the seven

volumes of materials relating to his case included all the public statements in which he criticised the schism over the past 10 years.

- On April 1, the SBU conducted searches in the house of Metropolitan Pavel of Vyshgorod and Chernobyl, the abbot of the Kiev-Pechersk Lavra monastery, and brought charges against him under Article 161 (violation of citizens' equality based on their religious beliefs) and for “justifying the armed aggression of the Russian Federation against Ukraine” based on the opinions the metropolitan expressed in a private conversation. He was sentenced to house arrest with electronic tagging.
- In April 2023, the Uzhgorod City District Court adopted a sentence for Archpriest Dmitry Sidor of the Uzhgorod Cathedral of the Holy Cross under the article on the incitement of religious strife. He was ordered to surrender his foreign passport and prohibited from leaving the city or communicating with witnesses in his case. The reason was his church sermons on religious matters. Archpriest Dmitry Sidor was charged with inciting religious strife because he denounced schismatics as “infidels” and “satanists.” The archpriest has pleaded not guilty; the trial is ongoing.
- On June 1, the SBU reported that Metropolitan Vissarion of Ovruch and Korosten had been charged with suspicion of inciting religious strife. The evidence presented by the Zhitomir prosecutor’s office consisted of photographs of old leaflets and materials in defence of the Orthodox Church condemning the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the Kiev Patriarchate. According to the prosecutors, Metropolitan Vissarion and the secretary of the diocese’s administration “have been producing and distributing leaflets fostering religious strife and hatred of the UOC-KP congregation since 2017.”
- On May 22, 2023, Metropolitan Longin of Bancheny was summoned to the Chernovtsy police station for interrogation, and charged with suspicion of violating the equality of citizens. According to the SBU press service, the charges were based on his sermons in which he condemned the Ukrainian schism. During the metropolitan’s interrogation, several hundred believers and monks of the Bancheny Monastery were standing in prayer at the police station. The SBU later put pressure on the event’s organisers and participants, who received call-up papers.

Apart from arrests of UOC bishops and clergymen, there are cases of the disappearance and kidnapping of clergymen, evidence of their torture and beating and even death under very strange or unascertained circumstances.

- On March 9, 2022, armed men seized and shut down the Dukonya Holy Trinity Monastery in the town of Verkhovina, Ivano-Frankovsk Region. The aged Archimandrite Titus (Drachuk), father superior of the monastery, was beaten up and held captive for several days. The local authorities turned the monastery over to the schismatics. Archimandrite Titus was taken to a neighbouring

region, where he was released and prohibited from returning to the Ivano-Frankovsk Region on pain of death.

- On March 16, 2022, armed and masked men openly beat up and abducted Archimandrite Laurus (Berezovsky) in the Zhitomir Region.
- His whereabouts are unknown; it is assumed with a large degree of certainty that he has been killed. Other clergymen have been abducted in other regions of Ukraine, including by members of Ukrainian security agencies.
- On April 10, 2022, members of the local government and armed men disrupted a service in the UOC church in the village of Verkhnyaya Yablonka, Lvov Region. The bishop was dragged outside, and the clergymen were ordered to close the church. The parishioners were told that their addresses were known and that they must start attending services at the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church or the [schismatic] Orthodox Church of Ukraine that very week or face “special measures.” The believers turned for help to the local police and SBU departments, which refused to accept their complaints. The same night, armed SBU men abducted dean of the church Archpriest Iliya Urusky, put a bag on his head and interrogated him for nearly 24 hours.
- On April 10, 2023, an unidentified person attacked Bishop Nikita of Ivano-Frankovsk and Kolomyia without any provocation, hitting him in the face and on the head and beating him up at the building of the diocese administration in Chernovtsy. The man also beat up an underage sub-deacon. The police, who were summoned to the site, refused to register the attack. According to witnesses, the attacker openly told the police about his connection with the SBU.
- On May 6, Metropolitan Antony of Borispol and Brovary told believers after a communion service in the Church of St Agapetus in the Kiev-Pechersk Lavra that he had been illegally detained at a roadblock at the exit from Kiev in the morning. The police took his passport and kept him at the roadblock for 90 minutes, allegedly because Metropolitan Antony was on the extremist Mirotvorets website. He was told that they were waiting for a security service officer who was supposed to “talk to him.” The metropolitan got his documents back and was allowed to leave only after a police patrol summoned to the site accepted his statement on the illegal detainment. As a result, Metropolitan Antony failed to attend a service in the Gorodnitsa St George’s Monastery of the Zhitomir Diocese and had to return to the lavra.
- In May 2023, the Shevchenkovsky District Court in Kiev sentenced Orthodox journalist and satirical poet Yan Taksyur, who supports the canonical Ukrainian Orthodox Church, to 12 years in prison on charges of high treason. The next day, he was released in the context of a prisoner of war exchange and departed to Russia. Taksyur had been kept in detention, where he was tortured and denied medical assistance from March to September 2022, when he was released on bail for health reasons and underwent major surgery for cancer.

3. Actions by Ukrainian local authorities and self-government bodies against the UOC (as of June 16, 2023)

Local authorities issue recommendations or demands for Ukrainian Orthodox Church communities to convert into other denominations. Self-government bodies such as regional and city councils have sent appeals to the Ukrainian leadership calling for a ban on the UOC. Local governments in some cities and towns in Western Ukraine are taking efforts to shut down churches, prevent believers from attending services, and enact local bans on the UOC activity. Following are some examples:

- The UOC activity has been banned in the city of Lvov, with repeated arson, shutdowns and seizures of canonical Orthodox churches.
- Artyom Semenikhin, Mayor of Konotop, Sumy Region, published a directive to locally prohibit the activity of the UOC “as a threat to Ukraine’s national security.” In a social media post, he wrote: “There is no difference between the enemy and their agent. As to the Moscow Patriarchate, these two are rolled into one. I have made a decision to ban the activity of this Federal Security Service’s agent network in my city.”
- In May 2022, Mayor of Khmelnytsky Alexander Simchishin ordered to draw up a directive on the termination of the right to use land plots by “hostile religious organisations” and to transfer such plots from the UOC for its use by the OCU. In September 2022, Khmelnytsky Regional Council appealed to the Ukrainian leadership demanding a legal ban on the activity of the canonical Orthodox Church and cancellation of its Charter.
- On August 26, Ternopol Regional Council banned the activity of the UOC locally.
- On September 1, the City Council in Volochisk, Khmelnytsky Region, prohibited the activity of the UOC communities locally, with a ban on all public events and the recommendation for them to transfer to the OCU or specify “affiliation with the Russian Church” in their charters.
- The city council in Borispol, Kiev Region, suspended the activity of the UOC at the suggestion of the city mayor. Canonical Orthodox churches were placed under guard under the “enhanced security mode.” Public events, religious processions and Sunday school classes were prohibited.
- On September 29, Lutsk Regional Council supported the appeal made by head of the Volyn regional military administration to the Ukraine authorities which called for banning the UOC, launching an investigation into its “collaborationist activities,” and transferring the Kiev-Pechersk Lavra and the Pochayev Lavra to the “Ukrainian people,” and urged the regional military administration to cancel the registration of canonical Orthodox Church communities.

- On November 22, the city council in Gorodishche, Cherkassy Region, prohibited the activity of the UOC locally because allegedly it “posed a threat to the national security of Ukraine.” It also recommended that the communities of the canonical Orthodox Church should “change their jurisdiction and initiate their unification with the OCU.”
- On November 25, the regional council in the Vinnitsa Region banned the activity of the UOC locally.
- On December 7, Zhitomir Regional Council prohibited the activities of the UOC locally, calling for local governments to facilitate the transition of the canonical Orthodox Church communities to the OCU.
- On December 7, the city council in Uman, Cherkassy Region, banned the activity of the UOC locally and called on the Verkhovna Rada to impose a “ban on the Russian Orthodox Church and all its structural subdivisions on the territory of Ukraine.”
- In March 2023, Kiev City Council made a decision to locally restrict “any religious events outside places of worship” staged by “religious organisations ... that have canonical or communal connections with religious organisations of the aggressor state” [that is, by the UOC]. The decision is a de facto ban on any religious processions in the city staged by communities of the canonical Orthodox Church. Relevant departments of the mayor’s office were instructed to conduct an inventory of land plots and communal property leased or used by the UOC organisations.
- On April 4, 2023, Khmelnytsky Regional Council banned the activity of the UOC locally and recommended that self-government bodies conduct an inventory of the land plots owned by the canonical Orthodox Church to subsequently terminate the rights of use.
- The UOC was banned locally by Rovno Regional Council on April 10, 2023, Volyn Regional Council on April 11, 2023, Sambor City Council in the Lvov Region on April 19, 2023, and Zhitomir Regional Council on April 27, 2023.

According to the UOC leadership, a total of 81 resolutions were made by local governments to ban the canonical Orthodox Church as of March 1, 2023.

Certain regions and localities have seen an illegitimate termination of agreements with the UOC communities on the use of historical churches or monasteries; land plots, together with churches and cathedrals built on them have been illegally expropriated from local communities, with subsequent efforts to take possession of them or disrupt church services. Since early 2023, the following cases have taken place:

- In February 2023, the Ancient Chernigov National Architectural and Historical Sanctuary sent a letter to Metropolitan Ambrose of Chernigov and Novgorod-

Seversky to notify him of the termination of agreements on the use of the ancient church complex in the territory, which comprises the Trinity Monastery of the 17-18th centuries, the Yelets Monastery of the 12-17th centuries, and the Transfiguration Cathedral of the 11th century, upon the expiration of the agreements on the use of buildings in 2021. The letter also demanded that the sanctuary property is returned by March 27, 2023.

- In February 2023, Rovno District Administrative Court, following a lawsuit by the local “cleric” from the OCU, ruled to cancel the state registration of the land plot that belonged to the Trinity Gorodok Convent of the UOC’s Rovno Eparchy.
- In March 2023, the press service of the UOC’s Ternopol Eparchy published a comment on its website saying that Kremenets-Pochayev State Historical and Architectural Reserve had made attempts to strip the UOC community of its right to use the historical Cathedral of St Nicholas in Kremenets. With the parish unable to extend the agreement, a procedure was initiated to “transfer the cathedral back to public use”; a commission was launched for the return of property and a meeting organised on the property acceptance and transfer. However, the senior priest refused to sign the document. On February 8, the eparchy contacted the Ministry of Culture on the matter, but received no response.
- On April 4, 2023, Khmelnytsky City Council unanimously adopted a decision to seize 13 land plots from the UOC, including those of the cathedral church and the administration of the canonical Orthodox Church’s Khmelnytsky Eparchy, as well as the plot of the John the Baptist Monastery. Khmelnytsky Mayor Alexander Simchishin said the plots would be transferred to the OCU, adding that in case UOC communities transferred to the OCU, their contracts would be renewed. On May 24, Khmelnytsky City Council made a decision to transfer five land plots seized from the canonical Orthodox Church to other organisations, with the plots of the UOC’s Pokrovsky, Kazan and Nativity cathedrals to be transferred to “religious communities that have become affiliated with the OCU”, the plot of UOC Cathedral to be divided and partially given to the newly established OCU community, and one of the two UOC St George’s Church plots to be transferred to a military unit while the other one will go to the OCU community. In June, the mayor demanded once again that “structures affiliated with the Moscow Patriarchate must vacate the land plots as they use them illegally,” recalling that the UOC’s right to use 13 land plots was terminated and they would be returned to the city through legal action. One of the plots was intended for building a square, and another one for a new kindergarten, which the mayor called “extremely important.”
- On April 4, 2023, the city council in Kamenets-Podolsky, Khmelnytsky Region, adopted several decisions against the canonical Orthodox Church. Those included an appeal to Vladimir Zelensky, Verkhovna Rada, the Cabinet of Ministers and Khmelnytsky Regional State Administration calling for a ban on the UOC in Ukraine; an appeal to Metropolitan Theodore of Kamenets-Podolsky

and Gorodok calling for the eparchy's withdrawal from the Russian Church; and an appeal to Vladimir Zelensky and the Cabinet of Ministers as regards the termination of agreements with the UOC on the lease or use of state-owned church buildings. The deputies also voted for 20 projects to terminate the use or lease of UOC land plots, including those of the cathedral, the eparchy administration, churches, and chapels.

- On April 10, 2023, Rovno City Council terminated the UOC's right to use land plots in the city. The deputies addressed Ukraine's leadership and the Security Service, calling for a ban on the activity of the canonical Orthodox Church.
- On April 17, 2023, Ternopol City Council adopted a decision to seize the city cathedral's land plot from the UOC.
- On April 26, Lutsk City Council adopted a decision to conduct an immediate inventory of land plots and buildings used by the UOC and draw up draft resolutions on the termination of the right to use them, to be considered at the next session. The deputies also called on the Verkhovna Rada to promptly ban the UOC and appealed to Vladimir Zelensky asking for draft bills on banning the canonical Orthodox Church proposed by Nikolay Knyazhitsky (No. 8221) and Prime Minister Denis Shmygal (No. 8371) to be immediately considered by the Verkhovna Rada.
- On April 26, 2023, Sumy City Council ruled to deprive the UOC of the right to use municipal community land plots.
- On April 27, 2023, Chernovtsy City Council adopted a decision to seize 22 UOC cathedral and church land plots in the city. Explaining the move, Chernovtsy Mayor Roman Klichuk said they could be divided and partially used for "building playgrounds, a square, a public park, or a parking lot," adding that the UOC communities would not be allowed to build or repair facilities on the city territory.
- On April 27, 2023, the city council in Brovary, Kiev Region, terminated the agreements on the permanent use of four land plots where five UOC churches had been built.
- On April 27, the city council in Belaya Tserkov, Kiev Region, terminated the agreements on the use of land of the UOC Belaya Tserkov Eparchy's ten churches and transferred the eparchy's Transfiguration Cathedral to communal ownership. The eparchy is currently challenging the decision in court.
- On April 27, Zhitomir Regional Council banned the UOC locally and appealed to the Verkhovna Rada asking it to promptly consider the draft bills proposed by Nikolai Knyazhitsky and Denis Shmygal on banning the canonical Orthodox Church altogether. Also, the decision was revoked on the transfer of a land plot to the Athos Icon of the Mother of God Convent, which was returned to communal ownership.

- On May 16, Chernovtsy Regional Council banned religious organisations that were proved to “have ties with the aggressor country.” It was recommended that local communities terminate land and real estate leasing contracts with such organisations.
- On May 24, the city council in Mirgorod, Poltava Region, banned the UOC and deprived its communities of the right to use land plots. Five land plots owned by the canonical Orthodox Church were seized, including the land of the city cathedral.
- On May 30, the city council in Kovel, Volyn Region, terminated the UOC’s right to use land plots, with 14 church plots in Kovel and neighbouring villages to be seized.

Section 4: Seizing of UOC churches and illegal re-registration of parishes (as of June 16, 2023)

According to UOC hierarchs, 129 churches were seized in Ivano-Frankovsk, Lvov, Volyn, Rovno, Zhitomir, Khmelnytsky, Vinnitsa, Chernovtsy, Chernigov, Kiev and other regions of Ukraine in 2022, with only 31 parishes making the transition voluntarily. The widespread seizures of UOC churches do not stem from the people expressing their will or the democratic procedures on the ground, as the Ukrainian authorities claim, but are initiated by local authorities and officials. Most of the seizures have taken place in specific localities and districts where the authorities are explicitly open about their hostility towards the canonical Orthodox Church. In a number of regions and localities, local authorities and self-government bodies openly initiate and organise seizures of churches and often take part in them.

Typically, this is preceded by the illegal and forcible “re-registration” of UOC parishes to the OCU by state registrars. The OCU officially claims its title to the canonical UOC churches and monasteries throughout Ukraine. This “re-registration” is based on fake referendums with the participation not of the parish but the territorial community (i.e. the residents of a locality, including non-believers or people of different religious denominations), and sometimes even non-locals. Often, the minutes of such meetings and the ensuing “re-registration” papers are forged, and the “re-registration” itself is carried out in violation of the parish’s decision to remain part of the UOC, which was adopted at a parish meeting in keeping with the legal procedure and was properly documented.

Churches are often seized by gun-wielding attackers. In addition to the territorial defence paramilitary units, hostile takeovers are often supported by

local authorities and law enforcement agencies. People from other religious organisations are actively involved in them as well. These actions often include mass violence and harassment of clergymen.

According to the UOC hierarchs, 129 churches were seized in Ivano-Frankovsk, Lvov, Volyn, Rovno, Zhitomir, Khmelnytsky, Vinnitsa, Chernovtsy, Chernigov, Kiev and other regions of Ukraine in 2022, with only 31 parishes making the transition voluntarily. According to more recent estimates (Legal Department of the UOC, December 29, 2022), about 250 UOC churches have been seized in all. As of March 1, 2023, more than 300 parishes were illegally “re-registered” in 2022-2023.

The following UOC parish seizures were marked by egregious violence and vandalism:

- All UOC churches and monasteries were seized or closed down in the Ivano-Frankovsk region in 2022-2023. On several occasions, clergy, believers and monks were beaten up during the raids, and clergy was submitted to intimidation and armed abductions. On March 28, 2023 in Ivano-Frankovsk, OCU assaulted a cathedral of the UOC Ivano-Frankovsk Diocese with about 200 attackers, including masked gunmen and territorial defence unit members, broke down the gate and entered the church grounds, then broke down its side doors and sprayed tear gas inside, forcing the cathedral defenders out. The police remained uninvolved. Despite the fact that the UOC believers did not put up any resistance, they were beaten up: Bishop of Ivano-Frankovsk and Kolomyia Nikita had his skull cap knocked off his head, the cameraman conducting live broadcast was beaten up, and the broadcast was interrupted. Some of the clerics sought medical help for chemical burns of the cornea. The secretary of the diocesan office lost consciousness due to gas poisoning and was hospitalised in serious condition. Ivano-Frankovsk Mayor Ruslan Martsinkiv had earlier issued repeated calls to seize the UOC cathedral and openly supported the attack.
- On June 29, OCU clerics and supporters seized the UOC Church of the Intercession in Fastov, Kiev Region. They broke the locks and pushed back the Orthodox believers. The father superior was physically prevented from entering the church; the gunmen sent in by the authorities intimidated the parishioners; and the police assisted the attackers. Earlier, during an attempt to seize the same church, an OCU “cleric” kicked Father Superior of the UOC parish, Archpriest Anatoly Kirichenko-Kiriakidis, in the stomach knocking him down (a video is available). The case of battery was closed by the police due to a lack of evidence.
- On July 24, in the village of Pirogovtsy, Khmelnytsky Region, during a Sunday liturgy, OCU supporters led by the chairman of the district council attempted to break into a UOC church, broke the door lock, harassed the believers and,

following the service, beat up the father superior of the parish and parishioners, including women. Father Superior of the parish, Archpriest Alexander Kravets, was thrown down from the steps of the church. His pectoral cross broke. The attackers proceeded to kick him as he lay on the ground. One of the female parishioners had her head slammed against the brick wall of the church causing her to pass out. The chairman of the district council took part in the beating; the police did not intervene. Video recordings and eyewitness testimonies have been made public.

- On September 22, in the village of Popelnya, Zhitomir Region, OCU supporters and 100 gunmen from the local territorial defence unit made another attempt to seize the UOC church, having cordoned it off and broken down the outer and inner doors. Physical force was used against the parishioners who tried to protect the church. The police did not intervene. The parishioners claim that the seizure was preceded by a falsification of the parish's documents.
- On November 5, in the town of Pereyaslav, Kiev Region, OCU supporters, with the participation of the mayor of the town and the local territorial defence units, attempted to seize the UOC-operated Borisoglebsky Church. The locks were broken and replaced. Father Superior, Priest Oleg Rodionov, was thrown to the ground and brutally kicked; his wife was also beaten and forced to delete the video of the crime from her phone. Both victims were told they would be “slaughtered and their bodies would be found a week later.”
- On November 4 and 5, in the village of Demyantsy, Pereyaslav-Khmelnytsky District, Kiev region, members of a local criminal outfit made two attempts to break into a UOC church; the deacon of the church and his wife were beaten up; the mayor of the village council threatened the UOC clerics that they would be “cut into pieces and taken away from the premises in suitcases.”
- On November 19, in the village of Pukhovtsy, Brovary District, Kiev Region, an attempt was made to seize the church following an illegal “re-registration” of a UOC community. The territorial defence fighters and OCU activists broke the locks, pushed the parishioners out, beat up women, and tried to break the reporters' camera.
- On January 21, in the village of Tarasovka, Boyarsky District, Kiev Region, OCU supporters seized a church of the UOC Borispol Diocese. The territorial defence gunmen led by a representative of the local authorities, broke into the church grounds, broke the locks and locked themselves inside. A security guard from the UOC parish who attempted to put up resistance was beaten up and pepper spray was used on him.
- In February 2023, in Strelsk-Sarnensky District, Rovno Region, OCU supporters led by a local deputy attempted to seize a church of the UOC Sarnensky Diocese: women and elderly people were beaten up during the clashes. The police intervened and sprayed tear gas only when the conflict reached its high point. The church was sealed pending a court ruling.

- On February 25, 2023, in the village of Blistavitsa, Bucha District, Kiev Region, OCU supporters simulated an attempt to rob a UOC church at night (the gates were torn down and the door was damaged), and then tried to get inside under the pretext of making sure the property was safe. A deputy and an official from the Bucha Town Council, as well as militants from the local territorial defence units took part in the attempted seizure. The parishioners prevented the seizure. During the fray, one of the attackers punched the father superior's wife in the face.
- On April 5, 2023, OCU supporters and right-wing radical elements seized St George's Cathedral of the UOC Lvov Diocese. The parishioners offered little resistance and were forced out of the cathedral. After that, a fake referendum on the transition was held in the church with the participation of unknown individuals, and taking an "inventory" of the property was simulated. Metropolitan Filaret of Lvov and Galich was told to make an immediate transition to the OCU or to "hand over the property" to the OCU.
- On April 5, 2023, a UOC church was seized in the village of Zadubrovka, Zastanovsky District, Chernovtsy Region. Under the pretext of a funeral service for an OCU parishioner who had been killed in action, the clerics from the schismatic church and over 40 radicals wearing balaclavas entered the church grounds and broke inside the church, breaking the locks and beating up the canonical Orthodox Church believers. The assault took place during the funeral service for the deceased.
- From April 8 to 12 in Kamenets-Podolsky, Khmelnytsky Region, the municipal authorities staged mass protests by OCU supporters on the grounds of the UOC-operated Alexander Nevsky Cathedral.

Employees from publicly funded organisations, students and schoolchildren were forced to take part in the protests. The video footage shows open supporters of Satanist cults, neo-pagans and Greek Catholics among them, and a number of participants exchanged Nazi salutes. There were repeated attempts to assault the cathedral and numerous provocations against the believers.

- On April 24, in Brody, Zolochevsky District, Lvov Region, the mayor of the town and the chairman of the local district council announced the closure of the UOC-operated St Vladimir Church. It was sealed and the procedure for "transferring" the church to the OCU began. This church is privately owned, but, according to the officials, the father superior himself gave his consent to the closure of the church and signed the papers. On the same day in Zolochev, Lvov Region, the chairman of the district council ordered the seizure - "for military needs" - of a makeshift UOC church in the form of a construction shed which was also privately owned and sat on private land.

- On April 22, 2023, in the village of Trebukhov, Brovar District, Kiev Region, OCU proponents, with the support of the territorial defence gunmen, seized the UOC church and the house of the clergy of the parish. The doors of the church were broken in, and believers were beaten up. One of the OCU activists burned the Bible and prayer books in Russian, calling the books “garbage.”
- On May 6 in Boyarka, Kiev Region, unknown persons clad in military uniforms and wearing masks seized – with the assistance of the police – St Michael’s Church of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church. The numerous members of the church parish offered resistance. Pepper gas and brute physical force were used against the believers. Gates and doors were broken, the father superior was beaten up, his wife was hospitalised with a broken arm and leg. The UOC parish continued worship services: On May 7, over 130 parishioners prayed during the Sunday liturgy at the gates of the seized church. At the same time, about 15 OCU followers prayed inside the church.
- On May 13, in the village of Petropavlovskoye, Borispol District, Kiev Region, individuals dressed in military uniforms and wearing masks seized, with the support of local authorities, the church of UOC Borispol Diocese. During the clashes, several parishioners of the canonical Orthodox Church were injured, one of them was seriously injured (presumably, he suffered a craniocerebral trauma). The claim of the UOC community against illegal re-registration of the church is being determined in court.
- On May 20, a UOC church was seized in the village of Ryngach, Novoselitsky District, Chernovtsy Region. Forty gunmen who introduced themselves as members of a “private security company” took part in the seizure. The gate and the building doors were broken and windows were smashed. The attackers beat the father superior (punched him in the face, threw him on the ground, and kicked him), broke his cell phone and removed the hard disk from the video surveillance cameras.
- On June 2, in the town of Medzhibozh, Khmelnytsky District, Khmelnytsky Region, OCU supporters seized the UOC-operated St Nicholas church. Brute physical force was used against the believers. In particular, a deputy of the local district council snatched the phone from the hands of a female parishioner who was recording the attack. The police did not intervene. In late March 2023, the UOC parish decided at a meeting to remain part of the canonical Orthodox Church. The minutes were made available to the authorities.

5. Pressure exerted by national and regional authorities on major UOC monasteries (as of June 16, 2023)

Pressure on major UOC monasteries has increased. In May 2022, the state-supported OCU created and registered a “parallel parish” at the Kiev-

Pechersk Lavra, which is the UOC's largest monastery, under the same name. In 2023, the state did not renew the agreement on the use of Lavra's two largest churches that had been built and renovated with funds provided by the canonical Orthodox Church. Also unilaterally and without legal grounds, the long-term agreement with the UOC on using the other buildings within the confines of the Lavra was terminated. The Ministry of Culture and Information Policy of Ukraine is now pushing to have all buildings transferred to the state and the monastic community evicted from the monastery. The monastery hierarchs and the monks are being asked to join the rival OCU, which wants the monastery buildings transferred to it.

The OCU has created a "parallel" parish at Ukraine's second-largest monastery, the UOC-operated Pochayev Lavra (Ternopol region), as well. The OCU is making open calls to banish the UOC monks from the Pochayev Monastery and deliver possession of the monastery to the OCU. Local regional authorities insist on banishing the UOC monks from the Pochayev Lavra and putting its buildings on the state museum's books. Minister of Culture and Information Policy of Ukraine Alexander Tkachenko was supportive of this approach.

A decision by the National Security and Defence Council of Ukraine of December 1, 2022 and an executive order by President Zelensky of the same date provided legal grounds for the Ukrainian state's efforts to withdraw the buildings of the UOC's largest and oldest monastery – Kiev-Pechersk Lavra (10th century) – from the church's use.

In the Verkhovna Rada, the ruling party registered draft laws concerning withdrawal of the Kiev-Pechersk Lavra and the Pochayev Lavra from UOC use (see Section 1).

On March 10, 2023, the director of the National Architectural Reserve "Kiev-Pechersk Lavra" sent a letter to the "Kiev-Pechersk Lavra (monastery) operated by the UOC" (without mentioning the name of its father superior), informing the addressee about termination of the agreement on the use of the churches and monastery buildings and issuing a demand to vacate the monastery grounds by March 29, 2023. The findings of an interagency working group, which had allegedly "discovered violations by the monastery of the terms of the agreement regarding the use of the state property," were cited as grounds underlying the explicitly expressed demand to vacate the buildings by March 29.

In his remarks, the Minister of Culture and Information Policy of Ukraine Tkachenko repeatedly demanded that the UOC clergy leave the Kiev-Pechersk Lavra, and also made it clear that the monks were given a "choice" to either

leave the premises or join the OCU. Despite the lawsuits filed by the monastery and without a court ruling to that effect, in March-April 2023, the management of the reserve attempted, with the help of the police, to seal some of the monastery buildings and evict the monks from them, prevented the officiation, and regularly hindered the believers' access to the monastery's relics.

After the monks refused to vacate the monastery or to join the OCU, Metropolitan Pavel of Vyshgorod and Chernobyl was charged under Part 1 of Article 161 (“Violation of citizens’ rights based on their race, ethnicity, regional affiliation, or religious beliefs”) and Part 1 of Article 436-2 (“Justification and denial of the Russian Federation’s military aggression against Ukraine and glorification of its participants”) of the Criminal Code of Ukraine. He was put under house arrest on April 1, 2023. Posting on Telegram in June 2023, his lawyer Archpriest Nikita Chekman highlighted multiple investigative and procedural violations in Metropolitan Pavel's case. He said SBU officers were on round-the-clock duty outside the building in which Metropolitan Pavel was staying, and his visitors were summoned for questioning as witnesses and asked not to communicate with him.

The police and special services are putting pressure on the clergy and believers, preventing videotaping and are making illegal detentions with the use of brutal force. Criminal cases have been opened under far-fetched pretexts against four UOC activists who are now under house arrest.

On June 6, 2023, Minister of Culture and Information Policy of Ukraine Alexander Tkachenko made a post on Telegram saying that a ministerial commission had finished its work at the Kiev-Pechersk Lavra and, in conjunction with the reserve, signed an act of acceptance of state property. According to him, 79 buildings and structures in varying conditions had been “handed over.” He accused the UOC of “unauthorised rebuilding, additional building and redevelopment” of the buildings and issued a demand to stop using the Lavra buildings and return them to the reserve within three business days: “The Lavra should be Ukrainian, and it is being returned to the state.”

In its commentary, the legal department of the UOC called the minister's demand illegal, groundless and unactionable, and said that litigation under the lawsuit filed by the reserve continues.

On June 5, 2023, the Kiev’s Commercial Court again postponed for one month the preparatory hearing on the lawsuit brought by the Kiev-Pechersk Lavra reserve against the Kiev-Pechersk Monastery operated by the UOC to lift obstacles preventing it from using the property.

Section 6: Hate speech, unprovoked aggression and violence against the UOC clergy and believers (as of June 16, 2023)

Hate speech against the UOC is being fostered by prominent politicians, top public figures and regional officials. A wide-scale media campaign is being waged against it in the state-run and privately-owned media, which has led to acts of vandalism where UOC churches and shrines were put on fire, and unprovoked violence and aggression were used against UOC clerics and believers.

In 2022-2023, hate speech targeting the UOC was heard in public remarks made by senior Ukrainian state officials, high-ranking government officials and politicians, senior executives from the special services and law enforcement agencies, and prominent public and religious figures. Here are some examples:

- In December 2022, former Ukrainian President Petr Poroshenko said in an interview with Channel 5 which he owns: “I’m not sure I know a church going by the name of UOC. I’m aware that under the applicable legislation there is a Ukrainian branch of the Russian Orthodox Church... This is not a church. It is a KGB nest that approves and blesses the killings of Ukrainians, and a poison for any believer.”
- On January 27, 2023, in a commentary for Channel 24, Secretary of the National Security and Defence Council Alexey Danilov objected to calling the UOC a church: “When this institution [the UOC] is called a church, it doesn’t really track with the assignments that they receive.” He accused the UOC of “supporting terrorism,” “working exclusively for the FSB,” and of the fact that “these bastards travelled around the world and represented Russia beyond its borders.”
- August 26, 2022. Head of the Sumy Regional Military Administration Dmitry Zhivitsky: “The enemy has been clearly designated... I will do everything to make sure the Ukrainian Orthodox Church does not exist in the Sumy Region.”
- December 21, 2022, Head of the Lvov Regional Military Administration Maxim Kozitsky: “The church-wide separation of the UOC (MP) from the ROC is unavoidable. We should not discredit ourselves and must make the decision without delay.”
- July 8, 2022. Head of the Regional Council of Ternopol Region Mikhail Golovko: “The UOC is hostile to our state and engages in subversive and criminal activities... The liberation war for the Ukrainian state continues, and we cannot afford to remain tolerant in religious matters.”
- August 26, 2022. Chairman of the Rovno Regional Council Sergey Kondrachuk (dismissed from office), in an interview with a local TV channel called the UOC monks “a bunch of stinkers with messy hair” and its clerics “FSB popes.”

- On December 21, 2022, Head of the SBU Brigadier General Vasily Malyuk said the UOC provided “a fertile ground for the enemy spies” and that the SBU’s goal was to “clean as best we can this environment from the enemy presence.”
- In February 2023, in an interview, former head of the Ukrainian Defence Ministry’s Main Directorate of Intelligence Lieutenant-General Alexander Skipalsky urged Ukraine’s counterintelligence services to “focus on” the UOC and went as far as to make rude and insulting remarks about UOC believers: “When I see a procession of the Cross, it reminds me of a Judas goat leading the crowd to slaughter. Certainly, key positions [in the UOC] are manned by individuals working for Russia.”
- On April 27, 2023, Verkhovna Rada deputy Inna Sovsun (the Golos Party controlled by Poroshenko), the originator of a draft law to ban the UOC, accused the Verkhovna Rada of “lacking the political will” and called for a decision to be made. According to her, this “would relieve local tensions” and save local self-governments the trouble of “becoming parties to conflicts and having to forcefully throw the Russian Orthodox Church priests out of the Ukrainian churches.”
- During his visit to the OCU-operated Vladimir-Volyn Diocese its “head” Yepifany Dumenko criticised Patriarch Kirill, the Russian Orthodox Church and the stance adopted by the UOC. For example, in a May 10 sermon at an OCU cathedral in the Volyn Region, Yepifany Dumenko termed Moscow “today’s Egypt and Babylon,” called for a “conclusive freedom from Moscow’s slavery” and compared the believers of the canonical Orthodox Church to “the Jews in Egypt, who were so accustomed to being slaves that even after seeing miracles, they chose to follow not God, but the sacred golden calf which they were accustomed to and which for them represented the church canons and rules.”
- Archbishop of Rovno Ilarion Protsik (OCU) had the following to say in a parish sermon (May 2023): “We continue to put up with the Moscali who live under our houses. A mother buried her son today, and then went to the basement of the Resurrection Cathedral [a UOC cathedral], where the Moscali pray, and smashed her forehead against the floor praying hard for the damned Kirill. Where has the truth gone? What has happened to that mother’s reason and heart?”

Such remarks and the mass-scale information campaign against the UOC in major state-run and private media have led to unprovoked acts of violence and aggression against the clergy of the canonical Orthodox Church:

- On December 7, 2022, in the town of Chechelnyk, Gaisin District, Vinnitsa Region, an unspecified individual clad in the uniform of the Armed Forces of Ukraine beat up Archpriest Georgy Petrichenko, a clergyman from the Tulchin Diocese and a dean of the local church district. The priest was sitting in his car when an unknown man approached it and hit the car several times; when the

cleric stepped out of the car, the unknown man beat him up and broke the bridge of his nose, verbally abusing the priest in the process.

- On December 27, 2022, in the village of Novaya Moshchanitsa, Zdolbunov District, Rovno Region, a local OCU supporter attempted to destroy a shipment of building materials that was brought in for the construction of a new UOC church to replace the one that had been seized earlier, and beat up a 72-year-old female believer who tried to stop him, punching her several times in the face. The police who arrived on the scene took her statement, but refused to look for the attacker.
- On December 25, 2022, at the Transfiguration Church of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church in Chernomorsk, Odessa Region, an unknown individual rushed to the ambo and attempted to stab the father superior of the church, Archpriest Nikolay Pozdnyakov, who had come out to give communion to the parishioners. The parishioners tackled the attacker. The police arrived 30 minutes later, after multiple phone calls, and put the attacker into custody. However, he was released 24 hours later because of a lack of material evidence of offence.
- On January 2, 2023 at the UOC Church of the Intercession, Vinnitsa, an unknown person went on a rampage and started smashing the church interior. He then used a straight razor to cut the throat of Archpriest Antony Kovtonyuk, who came out of the sanctuary. The attacker resisted the police and was taken into custody only after being shot in the leg. The father superior was taken to hospital and operated on. The press service of the Vinnitsa Diocese issued an appeal to the Ukrainian media to “stop fomenting religious discord in Ukraine.”

7. Response by certain international human rights organisations

The Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) mentioned the persecution of the canonical Orthodox church in Ukraine in its reports on the human rights situation in this country. For example, its report for November 16, 2018 to February 15, 2019, contained several cases where the rights of UOC believers were impaired, including instances of harassment on behalf of the Security Service of Ukraine (searches and interrogations of UOC clergy). The OHCHR noted in the report that “a process of mandatory renaming of religious organisations that are affiliated with religious centres in the Russian Federation... is primarily targeting Ukrainian Orthodox Church communities and may be discriminatory,” while restrictions on the access of the clergymen of such organisations to the premises of the Ukrainian Armed Forces is contrary to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. The report went on to note that the so-called transfers of UOC communities to the OCU “in a few cases... were not voluntary and were initiated by state or local authorities or

even representatives of extreme right-wing groups, who were not members of those religious communities.”

Released on October 7, 2022, the Report of the Human Rights Council on its fifty-first session mentions that the UOC was banned from carrying out its activities “in at least seven territorial communities in Kyiv, Sumy and Lviv regions... for the duration of martial law.” It also notes that the authorities failed to provide a clear justification for the prohibition, while other civil society and religious organisations have not been suspended, which “may amount to a discriminatory measure on the ground of religion or affiliation with a particular religious group.”

The Report on the Human Rights Situation in Ukraine, covering the period from August 1, 2022 to January 31, 2023, mentions draft laws designed to ban the Russian Orthodox Church and the UOC, as well as to ban the use of the term “Orthodox” in the names of organisations not related to the OCU. It also mentions draft laws simplifying procedures for the “transition” and dissolution of UOC communities, as well as searches and interrogations of UOC hierarchs and clergymen with the use of a polygraph. The OHCHR expressed concern that the state’s activities targeting the UOC could be discriminatory.

In addition to this, the UN Human Rights Council published its decision expressing concern with reports about the rights violations faced by UOC believers. In particular, it noted: “The committee is concerned at reports of violence, intimidation and acts of vandalism of places of worship in connection with the process of transitioning churches and religious communities from the Ukrainian Orthodox Church to the newly established Orthodox Church of Ukraine. The Committee is further concerned at the reported inaction of the police in such incidents and the lack of information on investigations conducted by the State party.”

On March 14, 2023, Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov sent letters to UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres, President of the UN General Assembly Csaba Korosi, OSCE Chairperson-in-Office Bujar Osmani and OSCE Secretary General Helga Maria Schmid, drawing their attention to the glaring violations of universal human and constitutional rights of Orthodox believers in Ukraine. He wrote that these violations stem from the Kiev regime’s repressive policy aimed at destroying the UOC. These letters cite numerous instances of persecution against the canonical Orthodox church, including the mass seizure of UOC churches and the forced illegal dissolution of their communities under the pretext of ostensibly voluntary transfer to another jurisdiction; so-called restrictive measures (sanctions) against bishops of the canonical Orthodox

Church; stripping a number of its bishops of Ukrainian citizenship and psychological and physical intimidation of clergy and parishioners. Mr Lavrov referred to the actions of the Ukrainian authorities as a flagrant violation of the rights of Orthodox Christians in Ukraine and discrimination against them in violation of the universally recognised international legal documents – the UN Charter, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and the UN Declaration on the Elimination of All Forms of Intolerance and of Discrimination Based on Religion or Belief, to name a few. Mr Lavrov urged the international leaders to offer a principled assessment of the illegal actions by the Ukrainian regime as regards the UOC and to demand that Kiev stop its arbitrary treatment and repression of the canonical Orthodox Church, strictly observe its commitments under universally recognised international documents and prevent the forced eviction of monks from the Kiev-Pechersk Lavra.

Patriarch of Moscow and All Russia Kirill, members of the State Duma and Senators of the Federation Council of the Federal Assembly of the Russian Federation, as well as the Permanent Commission for International Human Rights Cooperation within the Presidential Council for Civil Society and Human Rights and other entities have also appealed to the international community asking it to condemn the Kiev regime and take measures to stop the persecution of the canonical Orthodox church in Ukraine.

Local Orthodox churches and their hierarchs, and also representatives of religious and civil society groups around the world regularly issue statements supporting the UOC and expressing their solidarity.

Unfortunately, the UN and other specialised organisations have yet to focus on the challenges faced by canonical Orthodoxy in Ukraine. The relevant international bodies usually limit their responses to the submissions from the Russian Foreign Ministry to formal replies saying that they are monitoring the developments. There still has been no adequate response to the anti-Orthodox policy adopted by the ruling regime in Kiev, or to multiple instances of the UOC's property and assets being seized, while its clergy and believers endured arbitrary treatment and violence. The authorities in Kiev have blatantly violated the following international legal documents, among others: the UN Charter, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and the UN Declaration on the Elimination of All Forms of Intolerance and of Discrimination Based on Religion or Belief, the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination, the corresponding commitments within the OSCE and many

other international acts guaranteeing the freedom of religion as an inalienable human right.

While presenting itself as a fierce advocate of the freedom of religion, the United States has been silencing information about the crimes perpetrated by Kiev. Acting at the level of the Congressional Commission on International Religious Freedom and the Department of State, the US regularly issues reports about the violation of religious rights around the world. However, they have failed to criticise Vladimir Zelensky's church policy since the persecution of Orthodox believers started in Ukraine, which could suggest that the US approves of the illegal acts committed by its underlings.



https://mid.ru/en/foreign_policy/humanitarian_cooperation/1898457/