

CHURCH, STATE, AND RUSSIA'S WAR ON UKRAINE

HEARING
BEFORE THE
COMMISSION ON SECURITY AND
COOPERATION IN EUROPE
U.S. HELSINKI COMMISSION
U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
ONE HUNDRED EIGHTEENTH CONGRESS
SECOND SESSION

APRIL 27, 2023

Printed for the use of the Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe

[CSCE118-3]



Available via www.csce.gov

U.S. GOVERNMENT PUBLISHING OFFICE
WASHINGTON : 2023

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CHURCH, STATE, AND RUSSIA'S WAR ON UKRAINE

COMMISSION ON SECURITY AND
COOPERATION IN EUROPE,
U.S. HELSINKI COMMISSION,
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES,

Thursday, April 27, 2023.

The hearing was held from 1:06 p.m. to 2:50 p.m., room 2020 Rayburn House Office Building, Washington, DC, Representative Joe Wilson [R-SC], Chairman, Commission for Security and Cooperation in Europe, presiding.

Committee Members Present: Representative Joe Wilson [R-SC], Chairman; Representative Steve Cohen [D-TN], Ranking Member; Representative Emanuel Cleaver [D-MO]; Representative Mike Lawler [R-NY]; Representative Marc Veasey [D-TX]; Representative Victoria Spartz [R-IN]; Representative Sheila Jackson Lee [D-TX].

Committee Staff Present: Demitra Pappas, Senior Advisor for the Department of State, Commission for Security and Cooperation in Europe.

Witnesses: His Beatitude Epiphaniy, Metropolitan of Kyiv and all Ukraine; The Most Reverend Yevstratiy [Zoria], Metropolitan of Bila Tserkva; Reverend Dr. Igor Bandura, Vice President of International Affairs for the Baptist Union of Ukraine.

OPENING STATEMENT OF HON. JOE WILSON, CHAIRMAN, U.S. HOUSE FROM SOUTH CAROLINA

Representative WILSON: Good afternoon, all who have joined us today.

Before we begin, I would like to acknowledge the ranking member, Steve Cohen of Tennessee, is present.

Additionally, we are really very fortunate to have Chaplain Margaret Kibben with us. She is the Chaplain of the House of Representatives. Additionally, she is an Admiral in the U.S. Navy. Then last month she actually visited Kyiv, Ukraine, and visited with religious leaders of Ukraine. So she is certainly a superstar standing up for the people of Ukraine, and so much appreciated.

We will have other members of the Commission come in and out. As always, there is so many competing meetings simultaneously.

As we begin today, it has been an historic day for Congressman Cohen and myself to be on the House floor, and that is we had a wonderful presentation today by the president of the Republic of Korea, Yoon Suk Yeol. President Yoon gave an excellent speech to the people of the United States, and it was just an extraordinary opportunity. I would like to read part of what he said because it relates to what we are doing today.

That is: "My friends, freedom and democracy are once again under threat. The war against Ukraine is a violation of international law. It is an attempt to unilaterally change the status quo with force. Korea strongly condemns the unprovoked and armed attack against Ukraine. When North Korea invaded us in 1950, democracies came running to help us. We fought together. We kept our freedom. The rest is history. Korea's experience shows us just how important it is for democracies to uphold solidarity. Korea will stand in solidarity with the free world. We will actively work and safeguard the freedom of the people of Ukraine and support their efforts in reconstruction."

What a remarkable indication of solidarity, perfectly clear, which is particularly incredible in that in 1960 after the Korean War the per capita income of Korea was \$67. Today, it is well over 30,000 dollars and it went from an economy of zero to being the 10th largest economy in the world. So free markets work, democracy works, and what a message for us to receive today. What an encouragement it can be for the people of Ukraine.

Additionally, as we begin I would like to introduce for the record from The New York Times an article of December 31, 2022, and it is "Clergymen or Spies? Churches Become Tools of War in Ukraine." Additionally, from Time Magazine of April 15, 2022, "How the Russian Orthodox Church is Helping Drive Putin's War in Ukraine." Without any objection, they shall be entered into the record.

I would also like to have these records in place and how important they are, which shows that this is not a new topic but current events. Arrest of Moscow-linked priests have brought things to a much clearer focus, which we will hear about today.

The Helsinki Commission has long championed the need to protect freedom of religion and belief. Although Ukraine is a state of diverse religions, today's hearing will focus on the largest religious group in Ukraine—that is, Christians. We cannot talk about Christians in Ukraine without discussing war criminal Putin's full-scale war. The war has made life dangerous for many Christians in occupied areas of Ukraine, who not only have to worry about their physical safety but the protection of other freedoms, including the right to believe and worship according to one's conscience.

Occupation authorities have used various tactics to deny believers the right to practice their faith, including by de facto banning religious groups not approved by the Russian-led occupation governments and destroying religious materials. The main targets are Christians not affiliated with the Moscow-controlled Ukrainian Orthodox Church, an arm of the Russian Orthodox Church, and any other nontraditional religions or beliefs—that is, religions that are not—cannot be controlled by the Kremlin.

Putin is also creating an additional challenge for the Ukrainian Government. The Ukrainian Orthodox Church, technically under Moscow's control though the level of loyalty may vary; the Orthodox Church of Ukraine, which officially split off from the former, are fighting for the future of Orthodoxy in Ukraine. The Kremlin has used Orthodox priests reporting to Moscow to engage in criminal activities against Ukraine on behalf of Putin, including full-blown wartime collaboration, even storing weapons. Ukrainian authorities have, sadly, found evidence of this. Patriarch Kirill, the leader of the Russian Orthodox Church, has bizarrely contrived Putin's war, resulting in mass murder of Ukrainian men, women, and children, as, quote, "An Apocalyptic Battle Against Evil."

Human rights experts have witnessed targeting of pastors and churches by Russian forces in eastern Ukraine, particularly of Evangelical Christians. Sacred sites have been destroyed and looted by the hundreds. This is not surprising. Putin imposes widespread restrictions on Christians sharing their faith in Russia.

Finally, given that our witnesses are all clergy themselves, I hope we will be able to discuss what religious communities around the world are doing to support Ukrainians and the role of Christians in Ukraine during wartime. Our esteemed witnesses today are well-qualified to speak to the diversity of Ukrainian Christianity.

First, we will hear from—a video message from Kyiv by His Beatitude Epiphaniy, Metropolitan of Kyiv and all Ukraine, the leader of the Orthodox Church of Ukraine. We thank His Beatitude and his—in particular for his time and his recognition of the importance of the discussion of Ukraine.

Next, speaking on behalf of the Orthodox Church of Ukraine and coming to us from Ukraine via video is The Most Reverend Metropolitan Yevstratiy of Bila Tserkva.

Joining us in Washington is the Reverend Dr. Igor Bandura, the Vice President of the International Affairs for the Baptist Union of Ukraine.

Unfortunately, we learned this morning The Most Reverend Borys Gudziak, the Archbishop of the Ukrainian Catholic Archeparchy of Philadelphia and President of the Ukrainian Catholic University in Lviv, will not be able to join us due to unforeseen family circumstances. I encourage you to read his excellent testimony, which we will be providing to you today.

With this, I want to turn to our ranking member, Steve Cohen, for any remarks. After that, we will hear from the Metropolitan Epiphaniy.

**STATEMENT OF STEVE COHEN, RANKING MEMBER, U.S.
HOUSE FROM TENNESSEE**

Representative COHEN: Thank you, Mr. —thank you, Mr. Chair. Is this working Okay? No. Does this need to work? Thank you, Mr. Chair.

It is an important—this is an important issue to be discussed. I look forward to the witnesses and their testimony and learning more about the issues with religion —[COMES ON MIC]—oh, smart. Thank you.

I look forward to hearing from the witnesses and learning more about which religion and the church has played in Russia and in Ukraine. I was in Russia many years ago when I was—learned about the musical group Pussy Riot and that they had demonstrated in a church not too far from the Kremlin. Their punishment was way more severe than it should have been, and they were sentenced, I believe, to Siberia, and they were punished for quite a while. The reason, as I was told, was because Putin wanted to have a relationship with Patriarch Kirill as part of a political patron relationship, and so they used that as a way to show his support for the church.

Putin claims to be very religious. I have never known a person who was religious and truly religious in terms of the way religion is supposed to be, not necessarily being a member of an organization, a member of a church, a dues-paying member, and somebody who stands up on Sunday or Friday or whatever the appropriate day is, who is in favor of killing his fellow citizens, condoning the rape of children and women, and the activities that Putin is engaged in in Ukraine and other places. Those are far from religious. They are the antithesis of religion. He has a relationship with Patriarch Kirill, which is really one that is not a holy relationship. I would like to learn more about what that relationship has been over the years and how in Ukraine the church that is more affiliated with Moscow, if they have actually committed offenses against the State in working for Russia and undermining the Ukrainian efforts. They deserve justice, but they also should not be working against the Ukrainian State in support of Moscow.

I look forward to the testimony and hope that we will be able—and I also want to say this. I just came from a program honoring the 75th birthday of Israel. I read of the religions in our briefing papers in Ukraine, and predominantly they are the Orthodox religions. There are some Catholics, a few Baptists, and some others. Jews are not mentioned. Yet, before Germany and its Nazi invasion and Nazi efforts, there were lots of Jews in Ukraine. In fact, the program I went to was honoring Golda Meir, who immigrated from Ukraine to Milwaukee and then to Israel. There were a lot of Jews in Russia, too, but what I have learned lately is that what Jews have been told in Russia is: Get out, this is not a safe place for Jewish people.

There is all kind of religious persecution going on by Putin in Russia and there has historically been by Nazis in Germany and what they tried—what they did to the Jews in the Holocaust. I personally see Putin as the successor to Hitler as far as engaging in genocide against the Ukrainian people and his activities there, which are reprehensible. I yield back the balance of my time.

Representative WILSON: Thank you very much, Ranking Member Steve Cohen of Tennessee.

With this, we will have a video from Kyiv with His Beatitude Epiphaniy, Metropolitan of Kyiv and All Ukraine, and the leader of the Orthodox Church of Ukraine. We now look forward to the video.

[PAUSE FOR TECHNICAL DIFFICULTIES.]

Representative COHEN: Just in the interest of bipartisanship, Trump said she was not his type. [LAUGHTER.]

[PAUSE FOR TECHNICAL DIFFICULTIES]

[A VIDEO PRESENTATION BEGINS WITH HIS BEATITUDE EPIPHANY]

**TESTIMONY OF HIS BEATITUDE EPIPHANY, METROPOLITAN
OF KYIV AND ALL UKRAINE**

HIS BEATITUDE EPIPHANY: [TRANSLATED FROM THE ORIGINAL UKRAINIAN] Honorable members of the U.S. Congress, distinguished guests, I deeply regret that for reasons beyond my control I am unable to join this important event dedicated to the protection of freedom of religion—one of the fundamental freedoms—in person.

Ukrainians are proud that from the very beginning of the restoration of Ukraine's independence, our state has been and remains committed to freedom of religion. This has made it possible, after years of Soviet repression and State atheism, to revive religious life in its diversity and to create effective mechanisms of interreligious and interconfessional cooperation, such as the All-Ukrainian Council of Churches and Religious Organizations.

In its hybrid war against Ukraine, Russia has unleashed new types of threat to religious freedom, including the Kremlin's use of a pseudo-Christian ideology to justify aggression and the coopting of all large religious bodies in Russia, most significantly the Moscow Patriarchate, as tools of propaganda and influence. In Russia itself, there is no real freedom of religion—both at the level of laws that severely limit the activities of religious organizations and put them under government control, and even more so at the level of practice.

The situation is even worse in the territories of Ukraine occupied by Russia, where all Ukrainian religious organizations that are not loyal to the occupation authorities are persecuted. Our priests are kidnapped and harassed, forced to join the Russian Orthodox Church and cooperate with the occupiers. The property of the religious communities is seized and used as desired by the occupiers. Ukrainian citizens are forcibly compelled to accept Russian passports and treated as citizens of Russia. Without a Russian passport, residents of the occupied territories become effectively illegal. The structures of the Russian Orthodox Church in the occupied territories are actually one of the instruments of influence and control.

Metropolitan Yevstratiy will in his address illustrate a number of specific threats, but in closing my remarks I want to draw attention to one key threat: The Russian Orthodox Church and its governing structure, the Moscow Patriarchate headed by Kirill Gundyayev, do not just cooperate with the Kremlin—they themselves have become part of the Russian State apparatus. The Moscow Patriarchate is not like a traditional religious body. In reality, it is a Russian Government agency that performs the functions of managing and controlling religious life, not only in Russia but also everywhere the Russian Church has spread. Professing conservative values through this patriarchate, the Kremlin seeks to recruit a range of religious bodies as partners or allies, particularly in America. In essence, the Moscow Patriarchate is in the religious dimension what the network RT—Russia Today—is in the information space: an instrument of propaganda and hybrid aggression.

Ukraine and the entire free world must respond to this challenge of religious institutions that have been transformed into instruments of aggression and war. I hope that appropriate proposals for the U.S. Congress will be the fruit of these hearings.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank the Congress, Government, and the people of the United States of America for supporting Ukraine and our people in the struggle for freedom against tyranny. May God guide you in your deliberations, and may God bless us all.

[VIDEO PRESENTATION ENDS.]

Representative WILSON: Ladies and gentlemen, we have been joined by our other colleagues, Congressman Emanuel Cleaver from Missouri, and we also have Congressman Mike Lawler from New York. So—and it continues the bipartisan composition of this Commission, which, again, I like to point out, unintentionally war criminal Putin has unified Republicans and Democrats to stand up for the people of Ukraine. We are here and live.

Then we have just been joined by Congresswoman Victoria Spartz, and Victoria herself is the first person born in Ukraine who has been elected to serve in the Congress of the United States. She is a superstar by herself, so we are really grateful for Victoria's service.

The testimony has been so important that I am very grateful that Demitra Pappas of the State Department will be reading the English translation of the presentation we just had.

Ms. PAPPAS: Honorable members of the U.S. Congress, distinguished guests, I deeply regret that for reasons beyond my control I am unable to join this important event dedicated to the protection of religious freedom, one of the fundamental freedoms, in person.

Ukrainians are proud that from the very beginning of the restoration of Ukraine's independence, our state has been and remains committed to freedom of religion. This has made it possible, after years of Soviet repression and state atheism, to revive religious life in its diversity and to create effective mechanisms of interreligious and interconfessional cooperation, such as the All-Ukrainian Council of Churches and Religious Organizations.

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passport, residents of the occupied territories become effectively illegal.

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Professing conservative values through the patriarchate, the Kremlin seeks to recruit a range of religious bodies as partners or allies, particularly in America. In essence, the Moscow Patriarchate is in the religious dimension of that the network RT, Russia Today, is in the information space—an instrument of propaganda and hybrid aggression. Ukraine, and the entire free world, must respond to this challenge of religious institutions that have been transformed into instruments of aggression and war. I hope that appropriate proposals for the U.S. Congress will be the fruit of these hearings.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank the Congress, Government, and people of the United States of America for supporting Ukraine, our people—and our people in this struggle for freedom against tyranny. May God guide you in your deliberations. May God bless us all. Metropolitan Epiphaniy.

Representative WILSON: Thank you very much, Ms. Pappas. What a moving testimony, and from the heart, you can tell. As we proceed, we now have The Most Reverend Metropolitan Yevstratiy of Bila Tserkva by video.

[PAUSE FOR TECHNICAL DIFFICULTIES.]

Representative WILSON: With technical difficulties, we will proceed immediately to our next witness. We are so grateful to have Reverend Dr. Igor Bandura with us. He is the Vice President of international affairs for the Baptist Union of Ukraine. So, Reverend, thank you so much for being here, and we look forward to your testimony.

TESTIMONY OF REVEREND DR. IGOR BANDURA, VICE PRESIDENT OF INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS FOR THE BAPTIST UNION OF UKRAINE

Dr. BANDURA: Dear Mr. Chairman, dear members of the committee, dear attendees, I have the honor to testify before you today representing the Evangelical Protestant Churches of Ukraine. [COMES ON MIC.]

Dear Mr. Chairman, dear members of the committee, dear attendees, I have the honor to testify before you today representing the Evangelical Protestant churches of Ukraine. Today I speak on behalf of more than 6,000 churches, the largest group of Evangelical Protestant churches in Europe.

As a minister of a Baptist Church, I want to point out the experience of religious oppressions and persecution during the Russian War against Ukraine is common to all Evangelical Protestant Churches. In the last document that was published on April 11, 2023, after the meeting of the chairman of the Ukrainian parliament, Ruslan Stefanchuk, with the Ukrainian Council of Churches and the religious organization on the issue of state-church relations in the context of the Russian war against Ukraine, it was noted, quote, “Ukraine is known in the world for its high level of religious freedom, religious pluralism, the absence of a State church, the equality of all religious organization before the law, developed interreligious dialog and cooperation between different churches. During the war, caused by Russian unjustified aggression, a high level of freedom of religion is maintained in Ukraine. There are no religious persecution, and democratic institutions and procedure continue to operate.” The end of the quote.

The only places where the problems with religious freedom have occurred are the Ukrainian territories occupied by Russia in 2014 and then, since the beginning of the massive aggression started on February 24, 2022. The situation also looked depressing since almost all the leaders of main religious denominations in Russia directly or indirectly supported Russia’s war against Ukraine and thereby agreed to the suffering of their fellow believers in Ukraine.

The concept of religious freedom for all turned out to be not only unacceptable and foreign for the Russian Government, which brought destruction and actually invited slavery to Ukrainians, but also aligned to the main religious denominations of Russia, which themselves suffer from restriction of religious freedom by the State.

The situation since 2014. Evangelical Protestant Churches in the occupied Crimea found themselves in a situation of religious restrictions during the period of the late Soviet Union. All life and activity is localized exclusively in church premises. As one minister testified, quote, “They beat us, but they do not even let us cry.” This emotional assessment reflects a general situation at the current moment.

On the territories of the occupied Luhansk region, Baptist Churches, together with Jehovah’s Witnesses, were recognized as terrorist organizations with all the correspondent consequences. All churches have lost their State registration, and to this day are in an uncertain status and full restriction of religious right.

Churches in the occupied territory of Donetsk region are in a slightly easier situation, but they also do not have legal status and are completely limited in their activities. A sufficient number of testimonies and materials have been collected since 2014 and transferred to various international human rights organizations.

I had the honor of being a part of the Ukrainian delegation in 2014 and participating in the similar hearing in the U.S. Congress on the situation with religious restrictions in the territories occupied by Russia. Unfortunately, since then, the situation has only worsened.

The situation since February 24, 2022—since the beginning of the war—and here I can recommend to look at these materials which have some statistics, and also there are two pages of testimonies and some QR code you can go and see video testimonies of

real people—pastors and priests—and their experience of being under religious oppression. Since the beginning of the war, 172 church buildings have been significantly damaged or completely destroyed—among them: Pentecostals, 75; Baptists, 51; Adventists, 24; others, 22. The buildings of three seminaries were bombed and looted—among them: Baptists, two educational institutions in Kherson and Irpin; and Pentecostal, one educational institution in Kyiv.

This is a testimony of president of Tavriski Christian Institute. Quote, “When Ukrainian Evangelicals have been experiencing various forms of persecution from Russian occupants during the occupation of the Kherson region. This is an example of the religious persecution initiated by the Russian Army as a property of the institute and Evangelical Seminary in Kherson, which was occupied on March 11, 2022, and liberated 8 months after. TCI Seminary in Kherson was a key Evangelical school in the south of Ukraine. However, it was occupied by Russian Army and turned into a military base and hospital. Since then, the campus has been robbed, and all valuables were stolen. Five campus buildings were completely ruined, and Christian literature in English and Ukrainian translations was burned or sent to a dump, as Russians considered it propaganda literature.

Furthermore, Christian paintings were destroyed or stolen. Russian soldiers also threatened local Christians, including TCI Staff, by saying that they deserved to be eliminated or dug into the ground. This kind of threat is not only terrifying, but also excludes any church from the right to exist except for the Russian Orthodox Church.

The occupation of TCI Seminary has had a significant emotional impact on its staff and local Christian community which cannot be underestimated as it affects the well-being of the local Christian community. Besides, it will have a long-lasting, negative impact on the development of Evangelical Churches and education in the region.

It is essential to ensure that the Ukrainian Evangelical community in Kherson region can restore its churches and seminaries, and that local believers can go back to worship and education.” The end of the quote.

Two hundred thirty churches that belong to the Baptist Union ceased to exist in the occupied territories. Most of the church members and pastors had to leave, saving their lives. These people lost not only their churches, but all their homes, and their usual life. Most families are separated. People are scattered all over the country. Thousands were forced to evacuate to Russia. Many are still there, and some found their way out of Russia, and together with millions of others became refugees in European countries and even in the United States of America.

The ideology of Russian world, carried by the occupying Russian Army, does not tolerate either freedom or freedom of religion. All churches that are not Orthodox or the Moscow Patriarchate must disappear. We are talking about the existential threat for Evangelical believers.

One example of occupied Vasylivka—on June 12, 2022, armed Russian occupiers came to the local church in the city of Vasylivka, Zaporizhzhia region, drove everyone out of the house of prayer, conducted a search, then sealed the building, took the keys, and said that totalitarian sects have no place in liberated Vasylivka. The pastor of the church, Mikolo Zholovan was placed under house arrest, having previously confiscated computer disk with all available information. Then, at the end of June, the pastor was arrested and held in the so-called Military Commandant's Office for almost 2 days. In the end the pastor was released, but the premises of the house of prayer were never returned. Numerous attempts to return it—by the way, the building is a historical monument—were unsuccessful. The church building has not yet been returned to the church.

There are many cases of abuse, kidnapping and torture of pastors and active church members. Of course we understand that many cases cannot be documented because the number of victims who are not ready to give public testimony about the horrors they experienced. Among the main reasons are shame, and danger for themselves or their relatives who still stayed in the occupied territories, or those who were forcibly deported to Russia. There is two examples.

One, Oleg Bondarenko, Pentecostal Pastor. He is a minister of the Christian Rehabilitation Center attached to the Pentecostal Church in the village of Motyzhyn, Kyiv region. At the beginning of the invasion, the Russians captured this center because they decided that there was a Ukrainian Military base there. They said the drug rehab center was a cover. Oleg was arrested and spent three days in prison. He himself was tortured, and also can hear the screams of civilians being killed by Russians. They tied me to the railing, he said. They started practicing blows. Then I was tied to a quad bike and dragged to the base where they tortured people.

Oleg was in a well without water for two days. When the Ukrainian Military counterattacked, Oleg prayed that the Russians would simply forget about him as they retreated. On March 27, he managed to escape.

Alexander Salfetnikov is the pastor of the Light of the Gospel Church in Balakleya. This is a city that has been under the occupation of the Russian Army since the first days of the full-scale invasion. During the first two months of the occupation, Alexander, together with his team of church members, had been helping to evacuate people to peaceful territories and providing humanitarian help to people in need. Every Sunday he faithfully conducted church services.

On May 17, the Russian military arrested him. Russian soldiers came to him, put a bag on his head, and took him to a cell. Although it was designed for two or three people, 18 people were there. Later he was taken to the first interrogation during which he was severely beaten. Alexander noticed that the interrogation was conducted by a man who furiously hated Evangelical Christians.

During the second interrogation, Alexander was accused of being an American agent. He was beaten again so that he could no longer stand on his feet. After that, he became so sick that he was taken to the hospital. After the hospital, he was brought home because he could not walk. For a long time he was carried in a wheelchair, then he walked with a cane. In this way, God saved him from inevitable death.

On September 11, 2022, the Church of Evangelical Christian Grace in Melitopol, Zaporizhzhia region, was occupied by the Russian military. Armed soldiers broke into the church right during the service. They collected the passports of all those present and announced the nationalization of the church building. In addition, the church members were accused of ties to the United States of America. At the beginning of 2023, the church ceased its activities.

In January 2023, the Russian occupying Army took the house of prayer from Transfiguration Baptist Church in the city of Lysychansk, Luhansk region. They took out everything that was of value to them, and later they settled several dozen Russian soldiers there. Today those believers who remain in the occupation are deprived of their building and the opportunity to gather together. These are just some real examples of religious persecution.

We are aware that the situation with religious oppression in the occupied territories will change only when the Ukrainian Army liberates those territories and return Ukrainian jurisdiction there. We ask everyone involved to continue to monitor the situation and carefully collect and document all the facts of restrictions on religious freedom. All crimes must be punished, and criminals must be brought before international court. Justice and freedom demand our joint efforts and protection. Thank you.

Representative WILSON: Thank you very much, Dr. Bandura. We now proceed by video with the Metropolitan Yevstratiy of Bila.

[CONFERS OFF MIC.] Uh-huh, I think.

STAFF: Sir, we going to see if we can get him on the phone. They are still having some technical—let's ask for questions. Let's go to questions now, and then once we—

Representative WILSON: Okay, and there are still some technical difficulties, but we are going to proceed—such an enterprising staff we have here.

As we begin, I want to thank Dr. Bandura for bringing this to our attention, and I hope people will look this up. The Institute of Religious Freedom—the website is irf.in.ua. The email address is info—I-N-F-O—@irf.in.ua. Again, the website—people really need to go to this—irf.in.ua. This is part of my 5 minutes—and that is that each of us, including the Chairman, will be limited to 5 minutes in terms of questions, and then—so this is part of my 5 minutes. I was so impressed by this document.

Something also—how important it is that actually real people are cited. It is not just a generic indication. Can you imagine a manual that people—this is real, and so people in the United States, around the world need to see the consequence of the persecution of people of religious faith, and this document is just so helpful and so positive.

I have always said that this particular conflict, this could be unlike any ever, and that is that—I really picked this up from a Ger-

man newspaper, the Handelskrieg, and that is it is a cellphone war. The incredible opportunity that the people of Ukraine have, the people of the world, is that they can document the atrocities that are occurring almost immediately. They can also document the individuals committing the atrocities, and then, with facial recognition, people will be identified. Then in line with prosecution of war crimes, they will be brought to justice, and then the chain of command can be determined. The Russian troops that are being sacrificed—from my perspective—by Putin and placed in this situation, they should know that their conduct is going to be monitored.

No war has ever been committed in such full view as what we have today, so something can come out of—good out of this.

With questions—and Dr. Bandura, you get the opportunity to answer all of them. So—

STAFF: Sir, I was going to say we do have now the Metropolitan via cellphone—to your point on cellphone wars.

Representative WILSON: Well, thank goodness for cellphones, and so now you are going to—so Metropolitan, we are so honored to have you with us.

Reverend YEVRATYI: Yes.

Representative WILSON: Thank you—

Reverend YEVRATYI: Can you hear me?

Representative WILSON: Yes, we can, and thank you. We look forward to your testimony, and we are just grateful for your service for the people of Ukraine.

Reverend YEVRATYI: Thank you. Thank you so much.

**TESTIMONY OF MOST REVEREND YEVRATYI [ZORIA],
METROPOLITAN OF BILA TSEKVA**

Honorable members of the U.S. Congress, and all participants of this hearing, ladies and gentlemen, thank you for allow me this opportunity to participate in this important gathering.

In his address to you, the primate of our Orthodox Church of Ukraine, Metropolitan Epiphaniy, outlined the main challenges facing our country and the world as a result of Kremlin aggression. I would like to focus on one of these in more detail.

In both Ukraine and Russia, the majority of the population profess Christianity and adherence to the Orthodox Church. Formally, we recognize the same dogma. We have the same liturgy. We recognize the same canon law. You probably are aware that world orthodoxy exists as a family of local churches and are independent of each other in matters of governance, but remain united in matters of doctrine and practice of religion.

Traditionally the borders of the territories of local churches coincide with the borders of the states formed by their respective peoples, now or in the past. Therefore, also we all consider ourselves a single church administratively. There are independent churches of Greece and Romania, Bulgaria, Georgia, Cyprus, and Serbia, Ukraine, and Russia, et cetera.

The Ukrainian and Russian Churches were formed and exist under different historical conditions. From the beginning of the creation of the Grand Duchy of Muscovy in 14th century, the Russian Church exist as a State Institution historically. In Ukraine, the Orthodox Church was a populist institution. The problem pointed out

by Metropolitan Epiphaniy namely is that Moscow Patriarchate is a State Agency of the Kremlin for religious matters and should be treated as such is not a new problem. The Moscow Church was formed and, for centuries, operated in this format.

For three centuries, Ukraine was subordinated to Russia. Until the end of the last century, the imperial political system of Russia used control over the Orthodox Church in Ukraine as one of the main tools for dissolving Ukrainian identity, imperial unification, and Russification of Ukraine. Then, when Ukraine regained independence in 1991, a large portion of the Orthodox believers and clergy severed administrative ties with the Moscow Patriarchate, forming a church independent from it.

As a root of this complex but inexorable moment, this independent church received recognition from the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople. We are the Orthodox Church of Ukraine.

At the same time, the structure of Russian Orthodox Church continues to exist in Ukraine—and also it called itself Ukrainian, and even made statements about its alleged independence from Moscow—actually remains subordinate to the Moscow Patriarchate. According to independent scientific surveys, today 55 percent of the population of Ukraine currently identify as members of our independent Orthodox Church of Ukraine, and no more than 4 percent as members of the Moscow Patriarchate. In the early years, especially during the years of dominance of Pro-Russian political forces in the Government of Ukraine, the Moscow Patriarchate was able to concentrate under its control many temples and religious buildings. Over three decades, Moscow has used these structures to vigorously propagate the ideology of *Russkiy Mir*—Russian world—which justifies Russian imperialism and military aggression.

The Institute for the Study of War has shown in its research that Moscow used the network of the Moscow Patriarchate in Ukraine for a long time before the invasion to prepare for a rapid offensive and to establish control during the planned occupation. Moreover, some clergy and laypeople carry out the Kremlin's plans without even realizing that they are participating in that.

In the leadership structure of the Moscow Patriarchate in Ukraine for the past two decades, Andriy Derkach, an agent of the Russian special services officially recognized by the U.S. Government, has played a significant shadow role. Vadim Novinsky, a corruption politician and oligarch who holds the rank of deacon of the Moscow Patriarchate, also has a decisive influence on the leadership of the Moscow Patriarchate in Ukraine. These two individuals have, and to a large extent continue to have, shadow control over the activities of the Moscow Patriarchate in Ukraine. We believe that in the interest of countering Russian hybrid aggression and in order to protect freedom of religion, these individuals and those associated with them should be subject to international sanctions.

One of the great gifts that the United States Constitution has given the world is the idea that the state must guarantee both free exercise and non-establishment equally for all religion. This concept, which is reflected in Ukraine's modern Constitution, requires that the state treat religious practices with respect, but also means that religious bodies are subject to the neutral and universal law

of the land. The state cannot allow any organization—secular or religious—to use its status as a cover for criminal activity, especially activity aiding an invading force during a time of war. The security and protection of Ukraine from Russian hybrid aggression can place a mutual legislative ban on administrative subordination of Ukrainian religious organization to Russian centers. These centers—not only the Russian Orthodox Church, but also main religious centers of, for example, certain Muslim or Protestant Christian groups—are under the control and influence of the Kremlin and are used to support Russia’s War in Ukraine.

This is not about interfering with any individual religious practices in Ukraine, but exclusively about taking away from Russia the tool of administrative control of religious bodies in Ukraine. Essentially the same mechanism would be used as those that recognize the legitimate free press by banning state propaganda outlet—those which keep open the free markets while banning actions which would undermine the nation’s sovereignty.

At a meeting of Ukrainian Council of Churches and Religious Organizations with the head of our parliament, all the main religious denominations of Ukraine—with the sole and obvious exception of the Moscow Patriarchate—agreed with the need to adopt such a law and express their readiness to participate in its discussion in preparation for the final vote.

In conclusion, I would like to thank the Congress, Government, and all the people of United States for supporting freedom of religion, and to testify that the Orthodox Church of Ukraine is open to cooperation with all interested institutions, including the Helsinki Commission.

Thank you, and may God bless you and protect all who today fight for our freedom. Thank you so much.

Representative WILSON: Thank you very much, Metropolitan, and we now will proceed to questions. Each of the Members of Congress who are here will have 5 minutes, including me, and I lose the first minute because I have already used that up for the beginning.

For both Dr. Bandura and Metropolitan, a question for each of you, and that is there have been denunciation of Putin’s war by priests and religious institutions in Russia, and they have been recently silenced, of course. Outside of Russia, do the Orthodox priests of the Russian Orthodox Church, are they able to speak freely or are they carefully monitored?

Reverend YEVSTRATYIY: As I see and as I know, it is a great problem that no one hierarch—no one bishop, archbishop or metropolitan of Russian Orthodox Church, outside Russia—in Europe, in America, or anywhere, raises their voice, against Putin’s aggression.

I saw some examples of persecution from church leadership of Moscow Patriarchate—those priests who raise their voice against war. For example, it has happened in Lithuania, where a group of Orthodox priests from patriarchy of Moscow Patriarchate from the very beginning had the official statement against Russian aggression, and very quickly the Metropolitan of Moscow Patriarchate in Lithuania put them under repression, banned for them to perform liturgies, and so on. Finally, for more than half of the year, they were under canonical church oppression. Then they were accepted as a clergy to Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople.

I know about one parish in Holland that transferred from Moscow Patriarchate to Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople, Russian Community, for the same reason, that they do not share official position of Moscow Patriarchate supporting Putin's aggression. Generally, it is a pity to say but Moscow Patriarchate unfortunately, in their leadership, including hierarchs of Russian Orthodox Church in United States and in Europe, they keep silent or try to justify in some way Russia's political position.

Representative WILSON: Well, thank you, Metropolitan. That is sad. Thank you for making that revelation.

Then, in lieu of a question, I would like to again refer people to the Institute for Religious Freedom, the website irf.in.ua. Email is info@irf.in.ua. The reason—I am hoping that, again, using the cellphone technology, that the destruction of different religious sites within Ukraine can be documented and then provided to the world, because the looting needs to be identified and recognized.

We now proceed in the most bipartisan of fashion to Congressman Emmanuel Cleaver of Missouri.

STATEMENT OF EMMANUEL CLEAVER, U.S. HOUSE FROM MISSOURI

Representative CLEAVER: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

I am struggling trying to understand more than on a surface level how the Russians are using the church. Can you help me? What is the theology that is being used? I mean, is there a theology that the Russian people are fed, that Jesus was Russian or—I mean, what—I am not sure I know how to ask the question differently. There is something that is generally used to capture people to one side, and particularly if it is the evil side. I am trying to think of a synonym for evil. It is hard for me to just accept that a large segment of the population would just follow the Russian Orthodox Church unless there is an appealing theology.

Representative WILSON: Metropolitan or Dr. Bandura, if you would like to answer. Something you should be aware, and that is that Congressman Cleaver is really speaking from the heart. He himself is a Baptist minister.

Representative CLEAVER: United Methodist.

Representative WILSON: He has the background of theological interest and concern and devotion. Either one of you who would like to answer.

Dr. BANDURA: I will try to do so.

First, unfortunately, as I told in my statement and as Metropolitan Yevstratiy told in his video message, we must divide in our consideration our attitude to Russian Orthodox Church as a community of believers and clergy, historical community of Christians in Russia, with huge amount of examples of sanctity, of dedication to Christianity and so on, and ruling structure, Moscow Patriarchate, as Kremlin's agency for religious affairs and control over Russian Orthodox Church and Orthodox activity. Patriarch Kirill Gundyayev himself and his entourage, they just use religious language. They just use gospel, names of Lord Jesus, and faith to justify current Kremlin policy.

It reminds me of the time of Soviet Union, when Moscow Patriarchate was totally controlled by Soviet Government. You know

that officially this patriarchate told, especially outside Soviet Union, that they had no persecution, they had no interference in the religious matter from Soviet Government, and so on. In reality, it was not true.

Now we can see the same. Russian Orthodox Church, as a community of believers—I would like to use this term—they are in captivity by government. They are controlled by government. From inside of this church, especially from Russia, it is not possible to have independent voice, with the exception of very few people who are so brave to criticize this position of Kirill Gundyayev and the official leadership of Moscow Patriarchate.

Unfortunately, they just use their position as Christian leaders, as the official representative of the church, to justify Kremlin policy. In reality, Kirill Gundyayev, other top hierarchs, are just some—comparable with other Russian top officials. Like Sergey Lavrov, who is the chief of Russian diplomacy, or Shoigu, who is the chief of Russian Army, Kirill Gundyayev is official of Kremlin administration for religious affairs. I think it is not possible to find in his position something which is really related with Christianity, Orthodoxy, Gospel, and to Jesus' teaching.

Thank you.

Representative WILSON: Mr. Bandura, thank you very much.

Representative CLEAVER: I spent time in Turkey. On Thursdays the Government, Erdogan, they would send out the message to all the Mosques for Friday, for the service. They controlled the theology. I mean, the Nazis—they slayeth our Lord. You know, we need to get rid of them. They slayeth our Lord. I mean, there is always something; you know, the Crusaders, 12 million people slaughtered in the name of serving the Lord.

There is something. I apologize if I cannot connect it right now. Please.

Reverend YEVSTRATIY: There is theology behind that, but unfortunately bad theology.

Representative CLEAVER: Yes.

Reverend YEVSTRATIY: It is not only theology, but a mixture of theology, nationalism, and imperial spirit.

Representative CLEAVER: Okay.

Reverend YEVSTRATIY: There is a concept of the Third Rome. Moscow is the Third Rome. There was one Rome, and the second one and the third one. The prophecy was this is the last one. According to this idea, Russia is the last blessing, messianic blessing, for the rest of the world. The West is morally corrupted. The West is liberal. The West neglected biblical conservative values. Russia is the last defender of traditional values, and Russia is the messianic power to rescue the rest of the world and bring the pure gospel back to the world.

This is something bigger than—it is a mixture of different ideas. This is behind all of that. This is why, under these beliefs, it is easy for Russian, both statesmen and religious leaders, to say that it is not the war but it is a special military operation. What difference it makes? What for them is difference: If it is special military operation, then you can kill Russians—Ukrainians.

If you believe that the simplest confession of faith of all Christians is very short—Jesus is lord—but it seems like in Russia it is

State is lord. Now everybody should pay legacy to the State, and then the State is the main one. The State dictate to the Church what to do. All this theology is behind that. There is theology, but it is bad theology. In fact, as many Orthodox Churches already stated, it is a modern heresy. The ideology of Russian war is a modern heresy, and it was already condemned by several largest Orthodox Church in the world.

Representative CLEAVER: I appreciate that. Theology is stinkin' thinkin'. Thank you.

Representative WILSON: Thank you very much, Congressman Cleaver.

We now proceed to Congressman Mike Lawler. We can recognize that he was bright enough to marry a member of the Orthodox Church. Congressman Lawler, all the way from New York.

STATEMENT OF MIKE LAWLER, U.S. HOUSE FROM NEW YORK

Representative LAWLER: Thank you, Chairman. My wife is from Moldova. She is Christian Orthodox. I have been there. I have been in the Orthodox Churches in Moldova.

As religious leaders, what message do you have for those using religion to justify violence? I think all of us here certainly are of the belief that, you know, frankly, that is the opposite of what religion is supposed to be doing. Religion is about unifying, bringing people together in faith and, you know, forging ahead to a more peaceful future. What would you say, as religious leaders, to those in Moscow or elsewhere that are using religion as a vehicle to promote violence and hatred and destruction across the world?

Representative WILSON: Metropolitan can proceed first, and then we will go to Dr. Bandura.

Reverend YEVSTRATIY: Thank you for your question. I think that in your question it is possible to hear the answer, because evil has no justification. Evil itself lie itself. It has no justification. From very beginning we try to call religious leaders in Russia open their eyes, open their ears, open their mind, to understand that Russian aggression and justification of Russian aggression, it is not just against Ukraine or against Europe or global West or United States. It is against Russia itself, because sooner or later Putin's regime will fall down. Russian nation and Russian religious leaders will bear this responsibility for a decay.

It reminds me of the phenomena of so-called German Christians, Protestants and Catholics, who supported the Nazi regime. After World War II, Christian Churches in Germany goes through the process of repentance and recognizes that they behaved indeed wrong against gospel and Jesus' teaching. Now we see the same process, and lessons of history from that time must remind these leaders that, sooner or later, truth will prevail. Everybody who tries to justify evil will be responsible and must bear this responsibility in front of mankind, and indeed in front of God himself.

Thank you.

Representative WILSON: Thank you very much, Metropolitan.

We now proceed to Dr. Bandura.

Dr. BANDURA: I think the message of all religious leaders should be very clear. There is no justification of aggression on religious basis in the Bible, in the Quran, in the Torah. This would be

very—this should be stated and repeated constantly and very clear. Everything else is misinterpretation and misrepresentation of religious view.

I may mention that well-respected Rabbi, Chief Rabbi of United Kingdom, who passed away 2 years ago, Jonathan Sacks, he is very clear on that. He gives many testimonies, just speaking from—speaking about three religions that, basically, are descendants of Abraham. That is Christian, Jewish people, and Muslim people. He—in his book, he gives many examples from the first book of the Bible, sharing the examples how descendants of Abraham and then Isaac and Jacob, even despite they were, like, two different lives, they were looking for peaceful coexistence. He give good lessons for us, more than religious leaders, how we can build relationship and trust, even with those who do not believe in God as we do.

Ukrainians are very good example of religious peace and understanding, because their council of churches and religious organizations consists with all Christian Churches—Orthodox, Catholic, Greek Catholics, Evangelicals. It also includes Jewish Community in Ukraine and Muslim Community in Ukraine. Even in his document I cited in my presentation was unanimously accepted by all these people. We worked in the agreement.

We have very respectful relationship between leaders. We have a tested history of 25 years of working together on the issue and matters that are important for our people. This is an example when we speak in the one voice against the war, against the aggression. I believe this is the best way to represent religious truth about war and war crime and religious oppression in our time.

Representative WILSON: Thank you very much, Dr. Bandura.

We now proceed to Congressman Marc Veasey of Texas.

STATEMENT OF MARC VEASEY, U.S. HOUSE FROM TEXAS

Representative VEASEY: Mr. Chairman, thank you very much and appreciate this hearing because I think this is really important.

We have seen in the past conflicts around the world where religion, religious symbols, those things have been, you know, used against people, you know, sometimes for psychological warfare reasons but, certainly, they have been used against people and countries, you know, for some sort of a gain.

I was just, you know, wondering, you know, how has Russia's physical destruction of churches and places of religious significance affected the people of Ukraine?

Dr. BANDURA: In this document that I shared, you can—you can find it. You can pay attention that 494 Church buildings and holy places have been either destroyed or severely damaged.

Representative VEASEY: How many of those are—and I am not sure if they keep things like historical records or historical markers in Ukraine but how many of those would be considered of historical significance?

Dr. BANDURA: I would say at least one-third of these buildings.

Representative VEASEY: Yes. Wow.

Dr. BANDURA: What is a matter of fact, if you look this—to the bottom of the page you will find out that the biggest number of churches destroyed belongs to Moscow Patriarchate. You know, so

it is a tragedy because they are standing for the war and they destroyed the churches that belong to their fellow Christians, that belong to their church, and it is a tragedy so we should stop that.

Representative VEASEY: Yes. Yes. What about—you know, because there is a commonality, you know, throughout the entire region, you know, whether it is Moldova, Romania, you know, I think that I was reading one of the testimonies that said that, you know, there is even a common, like, liturgy, you know, that is shared.

Do you—or do you think that long term this is going to cause a split to where, you know, that sort of commonality is shared will no longer take place anymore, that all of these different countries will sort of form, you know, their own, you know, offshoots or maybe even new religions that sort of look very similar to the ROC but may not exactly, you know, be like they look today?

Dr. BANDURA: From our perspective of leaders of Evangelical Protestant Churches, as a matter of fact, is the relationship between State and Church. Like, in Ukraine we do not have State Church. All the churches are equal and because of this we have peaceful relationship and we can work together.

Like, in Moldova you have democracy and you have separation of Church and State. You do not have much of the problems. In Russia what we understand the church is connected with the State and, in fact, the church became like a Department of State and here you hear all the differences and here you hear all the problems and divisions. I think Orthodox people can speak on their experience.

From our side, as long as you have this unity between Church—Orthodox Church and State you will have problems and such State as Russia would always use religion and Orthodox Church in their own causes against its neighbors because we should realize it is not about, like, two countries, one Muslim and the other is Christian. We are talking about two Christian countries. We are talking about majority of people in Ukraine and in Russia believe they are Orthodox people. Why are they fighting?

Representative VEASEY: Right.

Dr. BANDURA: Why are Russian Orthodox patriarch preached something like we called Orthodox Jihad when he said if you go to fight against Ukraine and you will die at the front line you would go right to paradise. It is not—it is not Christian theology. There was nothing like that even in Orthodox Church. This is the consequences of church being a part of the State politics and State propaganda.

Representative VEASEY: Yes. Wow. That is amazing. Okay. Thank you very much. I yield back.

Representative WILSON: Thank you, Dr. Bandura, and Metropolitan, would you like to comment?

Reverend YEVSTRATIY: Yes. I would like to add that it is not split between churches, Russian Orthodox Church and Ukrainian Orthodox Church. I told in my statement that we both are local, independent, in our governance—in our administrative matters of churches but we are the same family, the same Orthodox Church.

It is a split between church and something which try to control church life and which pretend to represent church voice and to be a representative of church public faith. It is a real split because

Moscow Patriarchate and leadership of Moscow Patriarchate and Patriarch Kirill Gundyayev himself, he pretends to be a religious leader, pretends to be a patriarch. In reality, as a top official, personally very rich man, a real oligarch, and one of the top propagandists of Kremlin, he and his collaborators, they just use their position in the church to spread Kremlin aggressive ideology, which have no real ground in Orthodox Christianity, Jesus' teachings, et cetera.

This is a split not between churches but it is split between truth and lie, light and darkness, good and evil, and this split must be because we know from gospel that Jesus told that he brings a sword to this world, the sword of truth which divide, create a wall, a border, between truth and untruth, good and evil. Thank you.

Representative WILSON: Thank you very much, Metropolitan.

Now we proceed with the extraordinary insight of Congresswoman Victoria Spartz.

STATEMENT OF VICTORIA SPARTZ, U.S. HOUSE FROM INDIANA

Representative SPARTZ: [OFF MIC] —I was baptized secretly when I was little, I have a very good understanding of what is happening.

I have a question for you as, you know, I would say Russia is involved in ethnic cleansing and oppression of minorities for a long time. What is happening in this war, a lot of, you know, minorities are sent to die in large numbers and a lot of them are not Christians. Have you heard from any, you know, Buddhist or Muslim leaders? Have any actually commented on any—sort of what is happening right now and oppressions that has happened within Russia of a lot of minorities dying in large numbers? Any of them express any concerns with that and oppression?

Dr. BANDURA: Yes. I do not know about Buddhists because this is probably a minority of minorities. Muslim community is mainly located in Crimea, and since 2014 they are under great pressure and usually when—

Representative SPARTZ: I am talking about the war. Right now a lot of republics within Russia are not Christians.

Dr. BANDURA: Okay.

Representative SPARTZ: A lot of them, you know, Russians that are fighting and dying in large numbers, they are from regions of Russia. Siberians have been oppressed by Moscow for a while, so—and using oppression of religion on a lot of those minorities. Russia had wars on that, Chechnya as an example. There are a lot of others that are not Christians. Have you heard from any leaders around the world raising concern that there is oppression of religious freedom within Russia and what is happening right now?

Dr. BANDURA: Yes. Not as many as we would like but, for example, when we have had the Ukrainian week here in Washington just recently, before that it was 3 days a conference or summit for religious persecution and I was present there, and many worldwide leaders, both political and religious, are standing and speaking boldly and openly about the situation in Russia.

I think we should speak more about that. It depends how you—how people value their religious freedom because for some it is nothing. If you have working economy, if you have a strong army,

religious freedom is not an issue. For us, we understand it is one of the basics.

Representative SPARTZ: I understand. I understand. I do not know—I do not know, Metropolitan, was if you have heard from other leaders around the world raising this concern.

Representative WILSON: So, Metropolitan—

Representative SPARTZ: Specifically religious leaders—Muslim religious leaders, Buddhist religious—and oppressions that happened in the freedom of religion within Russia with minorities. It just—if not, it is no. [OFF MIC]— my question.

Reverend YEVSTRATIY: I have no clear answer for your question because, you know, for a decade Russian Government and Official Representatives of Russian religious institutions, established institutions including Muslim institutions, Buddhist institutions, they had a lot of contact with different religious centers in communities around the globe. They use their influence in different religious communities to justify Kremlin policy and even religious matters in religious affairs including religious affairs.

It reminds me of times of Soviet Union that in reality everybody outside Soviet Union knows that persecutions exist and churches—church of majority and church minorities are persecuted. Officially all religious centers in Soviet Union told that they do not know about any persecution. Everything is accord in law, et cetera, and it is a problem because in reality in Russia is no freedom of religion.

You know, the so-called Yarovaya law that limited every aspect of church and religious lives. Even officially registered communities have huge limits in their activity and must have permission for any kind of specific activity like teaching for—teaching children religion or preaching publicly religion, et cetera. It is a problem that until now Russia treated more or less not like dictatorship and tyranny without real freedom, including freedom of religion. Until now Russia treated like State equal with other reasonable state.

In reality, Russia's religious—like, you know, example of Jehovah Witnesses, which they are totally banned. I would like to raise the example of one of a Jewish community in Russia which faced the expelling of their leader, their Chief Rabbi, because this chief rabbi did not want to publicly support Kremlin's policy.

He just keeps silent but Russian administration forced him to publicly support so-called special military operation and then because he did not publicly support the Kremlin's policy he was expelled from his position of Chief Rabbi and even forced to leave Russia. Now he lives in Israel. I think after collapse of Putin regime we will find a huge amount of evidences like we know now a huge amount of evidences from Soviet time of persecution of leaders of religious denominations, including minorities, in Russia.

Now I think it is a—it is a very important matter to keep an eye—keep the—and watch over this situation inside Russia with religious freedom for all, including minorities. Thank you.

Representative SPARTZ: Thank you. My time has expired.

Reverend YEVSTRATIY: Thank you.

Representative SPARTZ: I appreciate your comment. I know that, to your comment, Russian disinformation and propaganda does work here and in Europe, too, unfortunately, and we do some stu-

pid things. I would like maybe was to comment not already here but to the team related to the proposed legislation dealing with religious institutions connected on Russia under Ukrainian law. I know that my time is expired, but maybe you can share your thoughts later directly with the staff. I would appreciate that.

Yield back.

Representative WILSON: Thank you very much, Congresswoman Spartz.

We now proceed to Congresswoman Sheila Jackson Lee of Texas.

STATEMENT OF SHEILA JACKSON LEE, U.S. HOUSE FROM TEXAS

Representative JACKSON LEE: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. To the witnesses, thank you. We are—many of us diverse religions in this country but we are certainly aware of the higher power of religion and how religion can be the source of inspiration, the source of freedom.

It can also be used as the despot Putin to intimidate, to murder and kill, and to deny people their precious rights of religious freedom. This war is horrific. The voice of the church needs to be heard and it is sad for me to hear that the Putin regime has directly taken over the Ukraine Orthodox Church. They are pushing out the venom of the right or righteousness of the war, the war that Russia has against Ukraine.

I want to see the faith community in the United States be as helpful as they possibly can and I would be eager to hear of your thoughts about the overall faith community here, and as well have you heard of the dastardly—the bad behavior of Russia in stealing Ukrainian children? That, certainly, should go against the faithful, the people of faith. I would be interested in your thoughts about that.

I just want to take a scripture-based story that reminds us of what should happen here. When Jesus went into the temple and people were doing things that were inappropriate, they were doing wrong things, he proceeded to send them out of the temple, send them out because they were wrong and they were, in essence, creating an atmosphere of almost crime against religious beliefs.

Two things, if I can—what the faith community has been doing, what do we need to do, and what the faith community can do about the stealing of Ukrainian children. That seems to be something they should be concerned about.

Dr. BANDURA: It is a huge tragedy because the number of children forcefully sent to Russia and we do not know about their destiny. We do not know how many children have been adopted to Russian families and how many would be—how we would be able to bring them back.

The matter was raised and you know that Russian President Putin and the chairman of this committee that is in charge for this, or ombudsman—children ombudsman in Russia are under criminal persecution now just because of this crime, stealing children. The number is terrific and all the children were brought to Russia under the idea to bring them to safe territories, which is terrible.

You know, you come to destroy somebody's life and then you save their children from whom? From yourself. The work is going on and

I think international pressure is very important, and we hope that Ukraine would be able to bring back most of these children.

I would raise another concern. Not only the children that was literally stolen from Ukraine and sent to Russia, I would also raise a concern about family divided because 8 millions of people left Ukraine and spread all around European countries and the United States, and most of them are women with children and now children are growing without fathers. Children are under stress of being in new circumstances, schools where they do not understand the language, and it is just a terrible, terrible experience.

So it is not only about children stolen. It is also children in divided families and it is also growing children that became orphans because their fathers were killed in the war. These three groups of children are our great concern and we need to—international community to keep this, to speak about this, to pressure Russia to change the situation for better.

Representative WILSON: Thank you, Dr. Bandura.

Representative JACKSON LEE: May I quickly just add one quick word?

Representative WILSON: Well, hey, even better. I want the Metropolitan to also answer—

Representative JACKSON LEE: That is—

Representative WILSON: —The very heartfelt question by Congresswoman Sheila Jackson Lee.

Representative JACKSON LEE: I thank you, Mr. Chairman. That was what I was going to—can I add to Metropolitan to ask—excuse me, to tell me about the murder of religious leaders—the extent of murder of religious leaders. If I could hear about that I would appreciate it. If the Metropolitan could answer that. Thank you. I yield.

Reverend YEVRATYIY: Thank you so much. Thank you so much. It is so important question because, first of all, I would like to add to answer of Dr. Bandura that forced replacement of children from Ukrainian territory to Russia is an act of genocide—

Representative JACKSON LEE: Yes.

Reverend YEVRATYIY: —One of the many example of genocide because such behavior, such action, is clearly indicated in international law as one of acts of genocide.

Concerning the killing or persecution of religious leaders, now we know about 15 persons affiliated with our church—priests and other church persons from our church—who have been killed by Russians during the great-scale aggression. I know that in other religious communities they have those who been killed by Russians' aggression.

The main issue is that it is not just incidents. It is not just part of war action but it is part of general line of Russian behavior on occupied territories because it is designed from the very beginning, even before full-scale aggression, that when Russian troops went to particular settlement, city or town or village, the Russian security services immediately start to find who is leaders of local community, political leaders like local mayor, business leaders like owner of main business in this town, and religious leaders.

We know—I know from my personal experience because local priest of our church in Bucha near Kyiv, very known city, unfortunately, because the act of genocide, Father Andriy, who is a rector of St. Andrew's Church in Bucha he left the city on March 3rd, last year just a few days after the occupation of Bucha and next day when he was leaving his home somebody from Russian side tried to find him and asked his neighbors where is this priest.

I know from other priests from occupied territories of Kherson and other places that immediately Russians try to find, kidnap, and force these church leaders to be collaborators. They try to scare them, that—one priest told that—Russians told him, if you do not be with us we will rape your wife, we will kill your children, and then we will kill you.

This is one option. Another option you must sign agreement of cooperation, and this is not a accident but it is a general design to create atmosphere of fear. If such a respectable person in local community are not protected from Russian attacks, from Russian persecution, you—local inhabitants—have no real protection from new authorities. You must be loyal because if you will not be loyal you will face with very bad consequences, and it is a main problem.

I would like to underline repeatedly that it is not a fault of particular soldiers or somebody else but it is part of general design of occupation of Ukraine to find the local leaders and force them to be collaborators or persecute them, beat them, kidnap, imprison them, and even killed. Thank you.

Representative WILSON: Thank you. Metropolitan, thank you so much and I want to thank the Congresswoman for being here. Actually, both Congresswomen. How fortunate we are.

As I conclude, again, I want to refer people to the Institute for Religious Freedom. The website is irf.in.ua, and people need to look this up. It is so revealing and so well done. With this, I would like to thank everybody for their participation and the extraordinary staff of the Helsinki Commission.

With this we are adjourned. [SOUNDS GAVEL.]

[Whereupon, at 2:50 p.m., the hearing ended.]

ADDITIONAL SUBMISSIONS FOR THE RECORD

Additional Submission for the Record

OPENING STATEMENT BY CHAIRMAN JOE WILSON

The Commission will come to order. Good afternoon to all who have joined us today. Before we begin, I would like to acknowledge [other members present].

I would also like to enter two articles into the record that speak to the topic of this hearing: “Clergymen or Spies? Churches Become Tools of War in Ukraine” from the *New York Times*, and a *TIME* article from nearly a year ago called “How the Russian Orthodox Church is Helping Drive Putin’s War in Ukraine”—which shows that this is not a new topic, but current events and the arrests of Moscow-linked priests have brought things into much clearer focus, which we will hear about today.

The Helsinki Commission has long championed the need to protect freedom of religion and belief. Although Ukraine is a State of diverse religions, today’s hearing will focus on the largest religious group in Ukraine: Christians.

We cannot talk about Christians in Ukraine without discussing war criminal Putin’s full-scale war. The war has made life dangerous for many Christians in occupied areas of Ukraine who not only have to worry about their physical safety, but the protection of other freedoms, including the right to believe and worship according to one’s conscience. Occupation authorities have used various tactics to deny believers the right to practice their faith, including by de facto banning religious groups not approved by Russian-led occupation governments and destroying religious materials. The main targets are Christians not affiliated with the Moscow controlled Ukrainian Orthodox Church, an arm of the Russian Orthodox Church, and any other “nontraditional” religions or beliefs—that is, religions that cannot be controlled by the Kremlin.

Putin is also creating an additional challenge for the Ukrainian Government. The Ukrainian Orthodox Church, technically under Moscow’s control, though the level of loyalty may vary—and the Orthodox Church of Ukraine, which officially split off from the former, are fighting for the future of Orthodoxy in Ukraine. The Kremlin has used Orthodox priests reporting to Moscow to engage in criminal activities against Ukraine and on behalf of Russia, including full-blown wartime collaboration, even storing weapons. Ukrainian authorities have sadly found evidence of this.

Patriarch Kirill, the leader of the Russian Orthodox Church has bizarrely contrived Putin’s war, resulting in the mass murder of Ukrainian men, women, and children, as “An Apocalyptic Battle Against Evil.”

Human rights experts have witnessed targeting of pastors and churches by Russian forces in eastern Ukraine, particularly of evangelical Christians. Sacred sites have been destroyed and looted by the hundreds. This is not surprising. Putin imposes widespread restrictions on Christians sharing their faith in Russia.

Finally, given that our witnesses are all clergy themselves, I hope we will be able to discuss what religious communities around the world are doing to support Ukrainians, and the role of Christians in Ukraine during wartime.

Our esteemed witnesses today are well-qualified to speak to the diversity of Ukrainian Christianity:

- First, we will hear a video message from Kyiv by His Beatitude Epiphaniy Metropolitan of Kyiv and All Ukraine, the leader of the Orthodox Church of Ukraine. We thank His Beatitude in particular for his time and his recognition of the importance of this discussion for Ukraine.
- Next, speaking on behalf of the Orthodox Church of Ukraine and coming to us from Ukraine via video is The Most Reverend Metropolitan Yevstratiy of Bila Tserkva.
- Joining us here in Washington is Rev. Dr. Igor Bandura Vice President of International Affairs for the Baptist Union of Ukraine.
- Unfortunately, we learned this morning that The Most Reverend Borys Gudziak Archbishop of the Ukrainian Catholic Archeparchy of Philadelphia and President of Ukrainian Catholic University in Lviv will not be able to join us due to unforeseen circumstances. I encourage you to read his excellent testimony, which is in the briefing materials.
- With this, I will turn to [Commissioners present] for any opening remarks, after which we will hear from Metropolitan Epiphaniy.

**OPENING STATEMENT OF HON. BEN CARDIN, CO-CHAIRMAN, U.S.
HOUSE FROM MARYLAND**

Thank you, Chairman Wilson, for convening this hearing of the Helsinki Commission to look further into how Russia's genocidal war on Ukraine has brought intensified religious discrimination and a new dimension to its political influence network. As early as 2014, we saw Russia's suppression and de facto criminalization of largely Muslim Crimean Tatars after Russia illegally occupied the peninsula. This was only the beginning of Russia's threats to specific ethnic and religious groups. We should not be surprised that as Russia occupied more of Ukraine's territory, even more atrocities would follow. Our witnesses today, who represent three major Christian groups targeted simply for their spiritual and organizational independence from Moscow, know well the extent of this repression and how it has worsened since February 24, 2022.

Additionally, there has been a great deal of Russian disinformation surrounding the current conflict between the two Orthodox Churches in Ukraine. No world leader should be viewed entirely uncritically, and there are legitimate questions about how President Zelensky should handle Russia's nefarious influence in the Ukrainian Orthodox Church. Finding the right balance between pushing back against Russia's political manipulation of some clergy, and permitting religious communities and their leaders to choose their own course, is not easy. Russian propaganda is using the clash between churches as a tool to slander and discredit Ukraine's democratically elected government, as well as try to besmirch many other Ukrainians. I hope that our witnesses will bring some much-needed clarity and nuance to this discussion.

Ultimately, the only way to protect Ukraine's Christians, religious and ethnic minorities, and all Ukrainians living under foreign occupation is to give Ukraine what it needs to expel Russian troops and restore Ukraine's sovereignty over its internationally recognized 1991 borders. At the same time, we continue to encourage Ukraine to protect religious freedom as is consistent with international norms and OSCE commitments. Ukraine faces very real internal threats from Russia, but it is Ukraine's commitment to strengthening human rights which makes them so different from their neighbor and is necessary to uphold. We stand ready to support them in any way we can. Thank you to our witnesses for sharing your firsthand experiences of the current challenges to religious liberty in Ukraine.

**TESTIMONY OF HIS BEATITUDE EPIPHANIY, METROPOLITAN OF KYIV
AND ALL OF UKRAINE**

Honorable members of the U.S. Congress, Distinguished Guests,

I deeply regret that for reasons beyond my control I am unable to join this important event dedicated to the protection of freedom of religion—one of the fundamental freedoms—in person. Ukrainians are proud that from the very begging of the restoration of Ukraine's independence, our State has been and remains committed to freedom of religion. This has made it possible, after years of Soviet repression and State atheism, to revive religious life in its diversity, and to create effective mechanisms of interreligious and interconfessional cooperation, such as the All-Ukrainian Council of Churches and Religious Organizations.

In its hybrid war against Ukraine, Russia has unleashed new types of threat to religious freedom, including the Kremlin's use of a Pseudo-Christian ideology to justify aggression, and the coopting of all large religious bodies in Russia, most significantly the Moscow Patriarchate, as tools of propaganda and influence. In Russia itself, there is no real freedom of religion—both at the level of laws that severely limit the activities of religious organizations and put them under government control, and even more so at the level of practice.

The situation is even worse in the territories of Ukraine occupied by Russia, where all Ukrainian religious organizations that are not loyal to the occupation authorities are persecuted. Our priests are kidnapped and harassed, forced to join the Russian Orthodox Church and cooperate with the occupiers. The property of religious communities is seized and used as desired by the occupiers. Ukrainian citizens are forcibly compelled to accept Russian passports and treated as citizens of Russia. Without a Russian passport, residents of the occupied territories become effectively illegal. The structures of the Russian Orthodox Church in the occupied territories are actually one of the instruments of influence and control.

Metropolitan Yevstratiy will in his address illustrate a number of specific threats, but in closing my remarks, I want to draw attention to one key threat: The Russian Orthodox Church and its governing structure, the Moscow Patriarchate headed by Kirill Gundyev, do not just cooperate with the Kremlin—they themselves have become part of the Russian State apparatus. The Moscow Patriarchate is not like a traditional religious body. In reality, it is a Russian Government agency that performs the functions of managing and controlling religious life, not only in Russia, but also everywhere the Russian Church has spread.

Professing conservative values through this patriarchy, the Kremlin seeks to recruit a range of religious bodies as partners or allies, particularly in America. In essence, the Moscow Patriarchate is in the religious dimension what the network "RT"—Russia Today—is in the information space: An instrument of propaganda and hybrid aggression.

Ukraine and the entire free world must respond to this challenge of religious institutions that have been transformed into instruments of aggression and war. I hope that appropriate proposals for the U.S. Congress will be the fruit of these hearings. I would like to take this opportunity to thank the Congress, Government, and people of the United States of America for supporting Ukraine and our people in the struggle for freedom against tyranny.

May God guide you in your deliberations, and may God bless us all.

**TESTIMONY OF REVEREND DR. IGOR BANDURA, VICE PRESIDENT OF
INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS FOR THE BAPTIST UNION OF UKRAINE**

Dear Chairman, dear members of the committee, dear attendees!

I have the honor to testify before you today, representing the Evangelical-Protestant Churches of Ukraine. Today, I speak on behalf of more than 6,000 churches, the largest group of Evangelical churches in Europe. As the minister of Baptist churches, I want to point out that the experience of religious oppression and persecution during the Russian war against Ukraine is common to all Evangelical-Protestant churches.

In the last document that was published on April 11, 2023 after the meeting of the Chairman of the Parliament of Ukraine, Ruslan Stefanchuk, with the Ukrainian Council of Churches and Religious Organizations [UCCRO] on the issues of Church-State relations in the context of the Russian war against Ukraine, it was noted:

Ukraine is known in the world for its high level of religious freedom, religious pluralism, the absence of a "State church," the equality of all religious organizations before the law, developed inter-religious dialog and cooperation between different churches. During the war, caused by Russian unjustified aggression, a high level of freedom of religion is maintained in Ukraine, there are no religious persecutions, and democratic institutions and procedures continue to operate.

The only places where the problems with religious freedom have occurred are the Ukrainian territories occupied by Russia in 2014 and then since the beginning of the massive aggression started on February 24, 2022.

The situation also looks depressing, since almost all the leaders of main religious denominations in Russia directly or indirectly supported Russia's War against Ukraine and thereby agreed to the suffering of their fellow believers in Ukraine. The concept of religious freedom for all turned out to be not only unacceptable and foreign for the Russian Government, which brought destruction and actually invited slavery to Ukrainians, but also alien to the main religious denominations of Russia, which themselves suffer from the restriction of religious freedom by the State.

THE SITUATION SINCE 2014

Evangelical-Protestant Churches in the occupied Crimea found themselves in a situation of religious restrictions during the period of the late Soviet Union. All life and activity is localized exclusively in church premises. As one minister testified: "They Beat Us, But They Do Not Even Let Us Cry!". This emotional assessment reflects the general situation at the current moment.

On the territory of the occupied Luhansk region, Baptist Churches, together with Jehovah's Witnesses, were recognized as terrorist organizations with all the corresponding consequences. All churches have lost their State registration and to this day are in an uncertain status and full restriction of religious rights.

Churches in the occupied territory of Donetsk region are in a slightly easier situation, but they also do not have legal status and are completely limited in their activities.

A sufficient number of testimonies and materials have been collected since 2014 and transferred to various international human rights organizations. I had the honor of being part of the Ukrainian delegation in 2014 and participating in similar hearings in the US Congress on the situation with religious restrictions in the territories occupied by Russia. Since then, the situation has only worsened.

THE SITUATION SINCE FEBRUARY 24, 2022

THE DESTRUCTION OF CHURCH BUILDINGS

Since the beginning of the war, 172 church buildings have been significantly damaged or completely destroyed. Among them: Pentecostals—75; Baptists—51; Adventists—24; others—22.

The buildings of 3 seminaries were bombed and looted. Among them: Baptists—2 educational institutions in Kherson and Irpin; Pentecostals—one educational institution in Kyiv.

Tavriski Christian Institute [TCI]. Ukrainian Evangelicals have been experiencing various forms of persecution from Russian occupants during the occupation of the Kherson region. This is an example of the religious persecutions initiated by the Russian Army at the property of Tavriski Christian Institute [TCI], an Evangelical seminary in Kherson, which was occupied on March 11, 2022, and liberated 8 months after. TCI's seminary in Kherson was a key Evangelical School in the south of Ukraine. However, it was occupied by the Russian Army and turned into a military base and hospital. Since then, the campus has been robbed, and all valuables were stolen. Five campus buildings were completely ruined, and Christian literature in English and Ukrainian translations was burnt or sent to a dump, as Russians considered propaganda literature. Furthermore, Christian paintings were destroyed or stolen. Russian soldiers also threatened local Christians, including TCI's staff, by saying that they deserve to be eliminated or dug into the ground. This kind of threat is not only terrifying but also excludes any church from a right to exist except for the Russian Orthodox Church.

The occupation of TCI's seminary has had a significant emotional impact on its staff and the local Christian community, which cannot be underestimated as it affects the well-being of the local Christian community. Besides, it will have a long-lasting negative impact on the development of Evangelical Churches and education in the region. It is essential to ensure that the Ukrainian Evangelical Community in Kherson Region can restore its churches and seminaries and that local believers can get back to worship and education.

CHURCHES THAT CEASED TO EXIST IN THE OCCUPIED TERRITORIES

230 churches that belong to the Baptist Union ceased to exist in the occupied territories. Most of the church members and pastors had to leave saving their lives. These people lost not only their churches, but also their homes, their usual life. Most families are separated. People are scattered all over the country. Thousands were forced to evacuate to Russia. Many are still there and some found the way out of Russia and together with millions of other became refugees in European Countries and even in the USA. The ideology of “Russian World” carried by the occupying Russian Army does not tolerate either freedom or freedom of religion. All churches that are not Orthodox of the Moscow Patriarchate must disappear. We are talking about the existential threat for evangelical believers.

Occupied Vasilivka. On June 12, 2022, armed Russian occupiers came to the local church in the city of Vasylivka [Zaporizhia region], drove everyone out of the house of prayer, conducted a search, then sealed the building, took the keys and said that totalitarian sects have no place in “Liberated Vasylivka”. The pastor of the church, Mykola Zholovan, was placed under house arrest, having previously confiscated computer disks with all available information. Then, at the end of June, the pastor was arrested and held in the so-called “Military Commandant’s Office” for almost 2 days. In the end, the pastor was released, but the premises of the house of prayer were never returned. Numerous attempts to return it [by the way, the building is a historical monument] were unsuccessful. The church building has not yet been returned to the church.

ABUSE, KIDNAPPING AND TORTURE OF PASTORS AND ACTIVE CHURCH MEMBERS

Many cases cannot be documented because the number of victims were not ready to give public testimony about the horrors they experienced. Among the main reasons are shame and danger for themselves or their relatives who remained in the occupied territories or were forcibly deported to Russia.

Oleg Bondarenko, Pentecostal Pastor, is a minister of the Christian Rehabilitation Center attached to the Pentecostal Church in the village of Motyzhyn [Kyiv region]. At the beginning of the invasion, the Russians captured this center because they decided that there was a Ukrainian Military base there. They said the drug rehab center was a cover. Oleg was arrested and spent 3 days in prison. He himself was tortured and also heard the screams of civilians being killed by the Russians. “They tied me to the railing, they started practicing blows. Then I was tied to a quad bike and dragged to the base, where they tortured people.” Oleg was in a well without water for 2 days. When the Ukrainian Military counterattacked, Oleg prayed that the Russians would simply forget about him as they retreated. On March 27, he managed to escape.

Oleksandr Salfetnikov is the pastor of the “Light of the Gospel” Church in Balaklia. This is the city that has been under the occupation of the Russian Army since the first days of the full-scale invasion. During the first 2 months of the occupation, Oleksandr, together with a team of church members, had been helping to evacuate people to peaceful territory and providing humanitarian help to people in need. Every Sunday he faithfully conducted church services. On May 17, the Russian Military arrested him. Russian soldiers came to him, put a bag on his head and took him to a cell. Although it was designed for 2-3 people, 18 people were there. Alexander noticed that the interrogation was conducted by a man who furiously hated evangelical Christians. During the second interrogation, Alexander was accused of being an “American Agent.” He was beaten again so that he could no longer stand on his feet. After that, he became so sick that he was taken to the hospital. After the hospital, he was brought home because he could not walk. For a long time he was carried in a wheelchair, then he walked with a cane. In this way, God saved him from inevitable death.

THE SEIZURE OF CHURCH PREMISES

On September 11, 2022, the Church of Evangelical Christians “Grace” in Melitopol, Zaporizhia region, was occupied by the Russian military. Armed soldiers broke into the church right during the service. They collected the passports of all those present and announced the nationalization of the church building. In addition, the church members were accused of ties to the USA. At the beginning of 2023, the church ceased its activities.

In January 2023, the Russian occupying army took the house of prayer from the Transfiguration Baptist Church in the city of Lysychansk, Luhansk region. They took out everything that was of value to them, and later they settled several dozen Russian soldiers there. Today, those believers who remained in the occupation are deprived of their building and the opportunity to gather together.

A CALL TO ACTION

We are aware that the situation with religious oppression in the occupied territories will change only when the Ukrainian army liberates these territories and returns Ukrainian jurisdiction there. We ask everyone involved to continue to monitor the situation and carefully collect and document all the facts of restrictions on religious freedom. All crimes must be punished, and criminals must be brought before an international court. Justice and freedom demand our joint efforts and protection.

TESTIMONY OF METROPOLITAN YEVSTRATIY [ZORIA] OF ORTHODOX CHURCH OF UKRAINE

Honorable members of the U.S. Congress, fellow participants in these hearings, ladies and gentlemen.

Thank you for allowing me the opportunity to participate in this important gathering. In his address to you, the Primate of our Orthodox Church of Ukraine, Metropolitan Epiphany, outlined the main challenges facing our country and the world as a result of Kremlin aggression. I would like to focus on one of these in more detail.

In both Ukraine and Russia, the majority of the population professes Christianity and adherence to the Orthodox Church. Formally, we recognize the same dogma; we have the same liturgy; we recognize the same canon law. You probably are aware that World Orthodoxy exists as a family of local Churches that are independent of each other in matters of governance, but remain united in matters of doctrine and practice of religion. Traditionally, the borders of the territories of local Churches coincide with the borders of the states formed by the respective peoples now or in the past. Therefore, although we all consider ourselves a single Church, administratively there are independent Churches of Greece and Romania, Bulgaria and Georgia, Cyprus and Serbia, Ukraine and Russia, etc.

The Ukrainian and Russian Churches were formed and exist under different historical conditions. From the beginning of the creation of the Grand Duchy of Moscow in the 14th century, the Russian Church existed as a State institution. Historically, in Ukraine the Orthodox Church was a populist institution.

So, the problem pointed out by Metropolitan Epiphany, namely that the Moscow Patriarchate is a State agency of the Kremlin for religious matters and should be treated as such, is not a new problem. The Moscow Church was formed and for centuries operated in this format.

For three centuries, when Ukraine was subordinated to Russia, until the end of the last century, the imperial political system of Russia used control over the Orthodox Church in Ukraine as one of the main tools for dissolving Ukrainian identity, imperial unification and Russification of Ukraine.

Then, when Ukraine regained independence in 1991, a large portion of the Orthodox believers and clergy severed administrative ties with the Moscow Patriarchate, forming a Church independent from it. As a fruit of this complex but inexorable movement, this independent Church received recognition from the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople; We are the Orthodox Church of Ukraine. At the same time, the structure of the Russian Orthodox Church continues to exist in Ukraine, and, although it calls itself Ukrainian and even makes statements about its alleged independence from Moscow, actually remains subordinate to the Moscow Patriarchate.

According to independent scientific surveys, today 55 percent of the population of Ukraine currently identify as members of our independent Orthodox Church of Ukraine, and no more than 4 percent as members of the Moscow Patriarchate. In the early years, especially during the years of dominance of Pro-Russian political forces in the Government of Ukraine, the Moscow Patriarchate was able to con-

centrate under its control many temples and religious buildings, and over three decades Moscow has used these structures to vigorously propagate the ideology of “Russkiy Mir”, which justifies Russian imperialism and military aggression.

The Institute for the Study of War has shown in its research that Moscow used the network of the Moscow Patriarchate in Ukraine for a long time before the invasion to prepare for a rapid offensive and to establish control during the planned occupation. Moreover, some clergy and lay people carry out the Kremlin’s plans without even realizing that they are participating in them.

In the leadership structure of the Moscow Patriarchate in Ukraine for the past two decades, Andrii Derkach, an agent of the Russian special services officially recognized by the US Government, has played a significant shadow role. Vadym Novinsky, a pro-Russian politician and oligarch who holds the rank of deacon of the Moscow Patriarchate, also has a decisive influence on the leadership of the Moscow Patriarchate in Ukraine. These two individuals had and to a large extent continue to have shadow control over the activities of the Moscow Patriarchate in Ukraine. We believe that in the interests of countering Russian hybrid aggression and in order to protect freedom of religion, these individuals and those associated with them should be subject to international sanctions.

One of the great gifts that the United States Constitution has given the world is the idea that the State must guarantee both “free exercise” and “non-establishment” equally for all religions. This concept, which is reflected in Ukraine’s modern Constitution, requires that the State treat religious practices with respect, but also means that religious bodies are subject to the neutral and universal laws of the land. The State cannot allow any organization, secular or religious, to use its status as cover for criminal activity, especially activity aiding an invading force during a time of war.

The security and protection of Ukraine from Russian hybrid aggression compels a neutral legislative ban on administrative subordination of Ukrainian religious organizations to Russian centers. These centers—not only the Russian Orthodox Church, but also main religious centers of, for example, certain Muslim or Protestant Christian groups—are under the control and influence of the Kremlin and are used to support Russia’s war in Ukraine.

This is not about interfering with any individual religious practices in Ukraine, but exclusively about taking away from Russia the tool of administrative control of religious bodies in Ukraine. Essentially, the same mechanisms would be used as those that recognize the legitimate free press while banning State propaganda outlets, those which keep open the free market while banning actions which would undermine the Nation’s sovereignty.

At the meeting of the All-Ukrainian Council of Churches and Religious Organizations with the head of our parliament, all the main religious denominations of Ukraine, with the sole and obvious exception of the Moscow Patriarchate, agreed with the need to adopt such a law and expressed their readiness to participate in its discussion in preparation for the final vote.

In conclusion, I would like to thank the Congress, Government, and the people of the United States for supporting freedom of religion, and to testify that the Orthodox Church of Ukraine is open to cooperation with all interested institutions, including the Helsinki Commission.

Thank you, and may God bless you and protect all who today fight for our freedoms.

**TESTIMONY OF MOST REVEREND BORYS GUDZIAK, METROPOLITAN
ARCHBISHOP OF PHILADELPHIA OF THE UKRAINIAN CATHOLIC
CHURCH IN THE UNITED STATES**

Chairman Wilson, Co-Chairman Cardin, Ranking Members Cohen and Wicker, Distinguished Members of the Commission and dedicated staff:

Allow me to express deep gratitude for the prophetic work that you and your predecessors have been conducting for almost half a century by monitoring compliance with the Helsinki Accords, especially regarding their human rights provisions. You improve the lives of hundreds of millions. Thank you for your gracious invitation to testify before you about Russia’s War on Ukraine and the spiritual roots of Ukrainian resilience and resistance.

Along with facts, citations, and figures, allow me to share reflections on spiritual realities experienced by Ukrainians today. Besides going to Ukraine six times since February 2022, I have been privileged to visit ten countries receiving Ukrainian war refugees and to listen to their heartrending accounts.

* * *

In the mid 1940's after the Soviet conquest of western Ukraine, Stalin liquidated the visible structures of the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church. Its leadership was killed, imprisoned, or exiled to Siberia. The clergy was arrested, tortured, and murdered. All church buildings were confiscated, transferred to the Russian Orthodox Church, or transformed into dance halls, agricultural warehouses, or machine shops. My mentor, Patriarch Josyf Slipyj [1892—1984], the head of the Church, spent 18 years in the Gulag and in 1963 was exiled from the Soviet Union to Rome. He became the voice of the silenced martyrs in the free world.

Patriarch Josyf traveled the world witnessing to the fact that the persecuted but unbowed Church is alive. He often repeated that “The evil will not last forever.” Most analysts expected that the Soviet Union would endure for decades. Some considered his witness to be the senescent fancy of a man traumatized by years of detention and abuse. He, of course, was right, and we students were too young *not* to believe him. He had faith and hope, and he shared it. The Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church—illegal and in the catacombs for more than 40 years—emerged in 1989 with singular moral authority to play a seminal role in the social transformations occurring in post-Soviet Ukraine. Josyf Slipyj's words and witness reinforce our courage today when we read and hear about the devastating crimes against humanity in Bucha, Borodianka, Irpin, and Izyum, and the personal accounts of those tormented under Russian occupation in Ukraine.

Since 2014, and ever more starkly since February 2022, we are reminded that a centuries-long struggle continues against colonial forces seeking to eliminate Ukrainian identity, church life, and the very right for Ukrainians to exist. About his desire to advance such intentions the Russian president has been repeatedly explicit. The patterns and methods of empire—tsarist, communist, Putinist—remain fundamentally the same. They are evil; but, in Slipyj's words, this evil will not last forever. We need to do our part so it does not.

* * *

What is the fate of Ukrainian Churches under Russian rule? Here is a sample from a regional context. The following simplified and abridged list regarding conditions under Russian occupation was provided by the relatively modest Donetsk exarchate of the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church:

Saint Joseph Parish, Enerhodar—the priest had to flee, and all the building materials purchased to build the church were stolen.

Assumption of Anna Parish, Melitopol—the people gather without a priest.

Nativity of the Virgin Mary Parish, Melitopol—looted.

Ascension Parish, Lazurne—closed.

Sts Cyril and Methodius Parish, Polianivka—closed.

St Basil the Great Parish, Novovasylivka—closed.

Nativity of St John the Baptist Parish, Orlove—closed.

St Demetrius Parish, Sviatotroyitske—the people gather without a priest.

St Catherine Parish, Antonivka—the chapel was looted and transformed into a grocery shop.

The Transition of the Relics of St Nicholas Parish, Muratove—damaged.

Nativity of the Virgin Mary Parish, Kreminna—destroyed.

Pentecost Parish, Rozdolivka—damaged.

Seemingly dry facts and distant names, but so much excruciating human pain is connected with each of these attacks and losses. The general toll for all confessions throughout the country is shocking: the Russian invaders have destroyed or damaged some 500 houses of worship, so far.... Many priests and ministers have been arrested, detained, tortured, and reportedly, close to 30, have been killed. According to the papal nuncio in Kyiv, in the eastern most regions under occupation no Catholic priest, Roman or Greek, remains active. They have all had to leave, been arrested, or had to go into hiding. Public Catholic sacramental ministry has been impeded.

This should not be a surprise to those that know the historical precedents. Every Russian occupation of Ukrainian territory from the end of the eighteenth century to the present—be it tsarist, communist, or Putinists—has led to the banning and destruction of the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church. Those of other faith communities, at one time or another, have suffered persecution and prohibitions.

Here is a sampling of torment meted out to Ukrainian Protestants:

On March 19, 2022, the Russian military, which captured the city of Melitopol, Zaporizhzhia region, arrested [kidnapped] the evangelical bishop of the Word of Life Church, Dmytro Bodyu, a US citizen, and held him captive for 8 days.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XhgLwc2mla0>

The pastor of the Evangelical Church “Light of the Gospel” in Balaklia, Kharkiv region, Oleksandr Salfetnikov, was kidnapped by Russian soldiers on May 17, 2022. He was severely beaten and tortured in the commandant’s office and for some time was teetering between life and death in the intensive care unit.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5QNYatj-qIU>

On June 19, 2022, the occupiers kidnapped the pastor of the “Source of Life” Protestant Church, Valentin Zhuravlov, in Melitopol, Zaporizhzhia region. Armed Russian Military detained him during an interdenominational joint prayer for the end of the war in Ukraine. In October 2022, it was reported that Zhuravlov had been released.

<https://www.uscirf.gov/religious-prisoners-conscience/forb-victims-database/valentin-zhuravlov>

The Melitopol Christian Church in Melitopol was occupied by Russian forces who first ransacked the building and later confiscated it under the guise of creating a Ministry for Youth on newly occupied territory. Pastor Viktor Sergeev was later declared a terrorist by the Russian authorities. The church was later used as a regional branch of the “Young Guard of United Russia”.

<https://slovoproslovo.info/bili-tak-scho-ridniy-batko-ne-upiznav-sina-pastor-iz-melitopolya-rozpoviv-pro-zvirstva-armii-rosii/>

On September 11, 2022, armed Russian forces broke into the Evangelical Christian Grace Church in Melitopol during congregational prayer. The Russian military recorded the parishioners’ ID data, fingerprinted and photographed male members of the community, took their documents, and accused them of having “connections with the United States.” After that, the occupiers announced that they would “Nationalize” the church. The occupiers arrested two pastors of the congregation. The head pastor of the Church of Evangelical Christians Mykhailo Britsyn ended up in prison. He is still detained.

<https://www.uscirf.gov/religious-prisoners-conscience/forb-victims-database/mykhailo-britsyn>

The deputy head of the All-Ukrainian Union of Churches of Evangelical Christian Baptists, Serhiy Moroz, stated that the Russian military occupied three Baptist prayer houses in the Kherson region. Since the military took away all the property and transformed some of them into barracks, the faithful do not have the opportunity to pray there. As of October 2022, the prayer houses were standing but had been looted.

THE UKRAINIAN RELIGIOUS LANDSCAPE

A leading sociologist of religion, Jose Casanova, professor at Georgetown University, in his writings has amply illustrated how much more religious pluralism and respect for freedom of conscience there is in Ukraine than in Russia. A key feature of the Ukrainian religious landscape is the diversity and network of churches and organizations of different faiths. According to the Department of Religions and Nationalities of the Ministry of Culture of Ukraine, at the beginning of 2014, 35,646 individual religious communities [churches, houses of worship] were officially registered in Ukraine, while only 29,831 organizations operated in the Russian Federation, which has approximately 30 times the territory and four times the population of Ukraine. The All-Ukrainian Council of Churches and Religious Organizations created in 1996 brings together 16 Churches and confessions in a unique multi-religious body that represents 90 percent of all Ukrainian believers. All religious organizations have equal rights in Ukrainian society. None of the Churches ever developed a monopoly, never became a State church, with the privileges claimed by the Russian Orthodox Church [ROC] in the Russian Federation. In Russia, despite the nominal constitutional declaration of freedom of conscience, a rigid hierarchical model of state-church relations has been created. This has led to restrictions on religious freedom, including the banning or juridical delegitimization of certain religious communities.

THE RUSSIAN WAR

With the Russian aggression against Ukraine that began in 2014, the Catholic Church was hit hard. The chancery of the Donetsk Exarchate of the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church was ransacked. The bishop was forced to move out of his city into the unoccupied part of his diocesan territory. The communities of religious sisters were forced to leave. Many of the priests, for example, those who had served as chaplains for the Ukrainian military, faced death and had to flee. In Crimea, several religious groups, flourishing before 2014, have disappeared or left, and many of them presumably will never come back to an occupied Crimea, even if present hostilities cease. Crimean Tatars, the indigenous population of Crimea, mostly Sunni Muslims, are particularly oppressed. In Soviet times they were deported from Crimea to Central Asia. They were able to return to their ancestral land after *perestroika*. In independent Ukraine, up until the Russian annexation, the Crimean Tatar community flourished.

Since the full-scale invasion of February 2022, it is worth repeating, some 500 religious buildings and sites have been destroyed in Ukraine. As a result of Russian aggression 3,170 learning institutions, 150,000 residential buildings, and 1,216 medical facilities were destroyed or seriously damaged. Internationally, some conservative Christians view Putin as a protector of Christian values and of the Orthodox faith. Can you defend values by killing their carriers? Churches of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church [affiliated with the Moscow Patriarchate] have suffered the most from Russian aggression—at least 143 have been destroyed or damaged. For example, the Sviatohirsk Lavra, a monastic stronghold of Russian Orthodox influence in eastern Ukraine, was severely shelled and damaged. A plurality of the civilians killed by the invaders in eastern Ukraine are baptized members of the Moscow Patriarchate jurisdiction.

In Mariupol, the city of Mary, the building housing the Caritas [Catholic Charities] Foundation with a Greek Catholic chapel was destroyed. A tank fired twice at it, killing two employees and five members of their families who were inside. Some people were trapped but were later rescued. The priest was forced to leave Mariupol, and reportedly his house and the nearby chapel were destroyed.

OCCUPIED TERRITORIES

Presently, Russia controls about 17 percent of Ukraine's territory.

In the beginning, I noted the difference in the religious landscapes of Russia and Ukraine. Russian occupational forces do not understand the Ukrainian religious situation. *"They are perplexed by Ukrainian religious diversity. If something is incomprehensible, it causes a traditional imperialistic reaction, it must be destroyed, and everything else must be unified,"* states Ihor Kozlovskyy a Ukrainian religious scholar who on January 27, 2016 in Donetsk was arrested, tortured, and spent 700 days in detention, until he was released as part of a prisoner exchange.

He has described a pattern in the Russian regime's treatment of religious organizations in occupied territories.

1. Military pressure on religious organizations and repression: From the seizure of religious buildings to imprisonment and executions.
2. Control [interrogations of priests and ministers, coercion to collaborate.]

He speaks openly about the arrests, grilling of clergy, and torture to "break, intimidate, or destroy a person." Kozlovskyy predicts that occupation authorities will follow the pattern established in 2014 in the Donetsk and Luhansk regions, where Russian authorities deregistered "disloyal" religious communities and banned their activities.

The occupiers view religious leaders and communities, that are not affiliated with the Russian Orthodox Church, as agents and centers of freedom, trust, authority [about 70 percent of Ukrainians say they trust church leadership], and Ukrainian identity [mainly Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church and the Orthodox Church of Ukraine but it is also true of other religious denominations in Ukraine]. Therefore, they are under constant attack. Control over religious leaders is a way to control the population and legitimize the occupation.

A Ukrainian Greek Catholic priest from Melitopol whose community is under occupation and who was forced to leave testified that the Russian FSB and military authorities while interrogating him pressured him to divulge what people say during Confession.

<https://ukurier.gov.ua/uk/articles/svyashennik-ugkc-yakogo-deportuvali-z-melitopolya-/?fbclid=IwAR3d9Y2wj8yBBcMY6VGjeXVEdAuhZdtQwXWAMMNdx8wqVTTHDkFnhTvVVEk>

In areas under constant attack, the religious landscape is being physically eroded. Religious buildings are being destroyed, and communities are disappearing as believers leave their communities *en masse*. For example, the Jewish minority, although not officially targeted, has diminished considerably. Tens of thousands of Jews were forced to leave, and hundreds have died. American born Rabbi Yaakov Dov Bleich, head of a Kyiv synagogue and a prominent leader in the Ukrainian Jewish community for over 30 years, believes that the Jewish Community will not recover its numbers. The Greek Orthodox Community in Mariupol and in the south of the Donetsk region—a unique ethnic minority that lived there for hundreds of years—is almost totally eradicated. We will hear more from another witness about the Protestant communities persecuted by the Russian forces. I can testify that I am inspired by the witness of the Ukrainian Protestant denominations, for example, by that of my friend, the Evangelical Pastor from Mariupol, Hennadiy Mokhnenko.

As a Ukrainian Greek Catholic archbishop, I will briefly present the situation of my Church in some of the exarchates that are currently partially occupied.

THE ODESA EXARCHATE OF THE UKRAINIAN GREEK CATHOLIC CHURCH

The Kherson region is a part of the Exarchate. Seven parishes are under occupation, three priests—one married and two monks—were detained and interrogated but at the moment can minister.

THE DONETSK EXARCHATE OF THE UKRAINIAN GREEK CATHOLIC CHURCH

Today, due to the pressure and persecution of the occupation administrations, the activity of the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church, in the occupied territories of Donetsk, Luhansk, and Zaporizhzhia regions, is completely impeded [including six parishes in the Donetsk and Luhansk regions that have been occupied since 2014]. Some parishes stopped functioning because they were in the areas of fierce fighting, e.g., Bakhmut.

The Donetsk deanery—14 out of 14 parishes were forced to stop functioning [12 priests forced to leave].

The Zaporizhzhia deanery—15 out of 22 parishes stopped functioning [9 priests left].

Two priests of the Zaporizhzhia deanery, Ivan Levytskyi and Bohdan Heleta, both members of the Redemptorist Order, were imprisoned in November 2022, and their whereabouts remain unknown.

The Kramatorsk deanery—3 of 22 parishes stopped functioning [2 priests left].

POLITICAL INFLUENCE OF THE RUSSIAN ORTHODOX CHURCH

In the mind of the Kremlin and in the explicit words of the leader of the Russian Church, Patriarch Kirill, the assault on Ukrainians' freedom and dignity "is a metaphysical battle," for which the ROC provides ideological justification.

"Any war must have guns and ideas. In this war, the Kremlin has provided the guns, and I believe the Church is providing the ideas," states Archimandrite Cyril Hovorun, an Orthodox priest and theologian who in the 2000's worked in the central offices of the Moscow Patriarchate and today is professor at Loyola Marymount University and director of the Huffington Ecumenical Institute.

The Russian Orthodox Church has always been a strong supporter of the Russian regime: in tsarist times, after Stalin revived and reorganized it in 1943 after 25 years of brutal Soviet persecution beginning in 1917, and now under Vladimir Putin, promoting his dream of restoring the Russian empire.

In 2012, Patriarch Kirill obsequiously addressed Vladimir Putin as follow *"what were the 2000's then [after Putin came to power]? Through a miracle of God, with the active participation of the country's leadership, we managed to exit this horrible, systemic crisis. I should say it openly as a patriarch who must speak only the truth, without regard for the political situation or propaganda. You personally played a massive role in correcting this crooked twist of our history."*

The support of the Russian Orthodox Church has grown as the war has progressed, with Patriarch Kirill becoming one of the war's most prominent promoters. In his sermons, he repeatedly refers to foreign forces as aggressors trying to divide neighboring countries [Russia and Ukraine], which he describes as "One People." For him, the aggression is a fratricidal struggle.

"Most of the countries of the world are now under the colossal influence of one force, which today, unfortunately, opposes the force of our people," Kirill said, probably referring to the United States. *"All of our people today must wake up, wake up, understand that a special time has come, on which the historical fate of our people may depend."*

"We do not want to fight with anyone, Russia has never attacked anyone," Kirill said in his May 2022 sermon. *"It is surprising when a great and powerful country does not attack anyone. It has only been defending its borders."*

Such statements come after the discovery of the war crimes in Bucha, the carefully documented violent murders of innocent civilians, serial rapes; after the whole world witnessed the barbarity and unadulterated evil of the Russian invasion.

"The church realizes that if someone, driven by a sense of duty and the need to honor his oath, stays loyal to his vocation and dies while carrying out his military duty, then he is, without any doubt, doing a deed that is equal to sacrifice. He sacrifices himself for others, and therefore, we believe that this sacrifice washes away all the sins that a person has committed." Patriarch Kirill's sermon September 25, 2022.

Archbishop of the Greek Orthodox Church in the United States, His Grace Elpidophoros, called this statement a Jihadist-like promise. For him the hypocrisy of Kirill is dumbfounding: “*Russian mercenaries and soldiers murder, rape, kidnap, and loot with his blessing.*”

As the war continues, Patriarch Kirill’s cynicism has progressed:

“*This is how it will be in Ukraine—there will be no trace of the schismatics, because they are fulfilling the evil, devilish will, destroying Orthodoxy in the Kyivan land.*” [From Patriarch Kirill’s sermon on January 8, 2023.]

The Russian aggression against Ukraine is not a plan and the determination merely of President Putin promoted by the words of Patriarch Kirill. The support, or at least acquiescence, of the Russian Church and society is scandalously broad. Not one of the approximately 400 bishops in Russia has spoken out against the war. The ROC clergy is a huge body including more than 40,000 full-time clerics, priests and deacons internationally. Only approximately 300—less than 1 percent and mostly those outside of Russia—have signed a joint public statement criticizing the war. Moreover, 700 university rectors, the leaders of 700 top academic institutions, signed a public statement supporting the war. Sociological surveys [to be taken with a grain of salt in a totalitarian society] indicate that President Putin’s approval rating in Russia is above 80 percent [as of March 2023] and that consistently over the last year approximately 70 percent of the Russian population has supported the war. The contribution of the ROC to this consensus has been considerable and is damning.

Russian theologian, Sergei Chapnin, former deputy editor-in-chief of the Moscow Patriarchate Publishing House, now at the Orthodox Christian Study Center of Fordham University, addressed the hypocrisy of the ROC bishops in an open letter [February 6, 2023]. He reproached them for being “embittered castle-builders swilling the cocktail of imperial myth, resentment, and unbelievably primitive eschatology.... You stand by a man [Patriarch Kirill] who justifies war crimes and has betrayed the Church. You repeat his words, retell his criminal arguments.”

<https://publicorthodoxy.org/2023/02/06/open-letter-russian-bishops/>

FAITH IN ACTION

Although this hearing centers on the Russian persecution of religion and national identity on the occupied territories and the Russian Orthodox Church’s ideological role in the aggression against Ukraine, I would like to conclude my testimony with a supplementary perspective, one that focusses on the hope and faith of many in Ukraine and helps explain the fortitude of David’s stand against Goliath.

There are various ways to look at the spiritual life. In the minds of many, “Religion” is readily measured by institutional and structural categories. Yet for a Christian, the Church is not a building that can be destroyed or an organization that can be banned. It is the Body of Christ—a mystical phenomenon. We cannot speak about the Church without mentioning the foundation it is built on—faith in the death and resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ. This is at the crux of the Church’s existence and activity. What we see happening in Ukraine brings us back to this core.

Facing dangers and risking their lives, many Ukrainians today ask themselves fundamental existential questions: about life, death, and eternity. The specter of death, an ever-present menace, leads to burning questions about the essence and criteria of life. People in Ukraine are constantly pushed to consider their fate and their faith. In Ukraine, there is a palpable belief in eternity. Ukrainians are willing to risk their lives, and the fear of death is not stopping them. The hope of eternal life overcomes this fear. For many, God has overcome death by His solidarity with humanity in its death.

As the saying goes, in the foxholes there are few atheists. Today, Ukraine is one big foxhole. The priests and bishops with whom I regularly communicate have shared that during this month's Easter services, churches were full despite the fact that civil authorities encouraged people to avoid public places since the Russians target objects of the civilian infrastructure. Sociological studies show that various indicators of religious belief and practice, the level of trust regarding churches and religious organizations, and their role in society at a time of war are for the most part generally stable or rising.

The Razumkov Centre survey "War and Church the Religious situation in Ukraine 2022" explains further:

<https://razumkov.org.ua/images/2023/02/13/2022—Religiya—ENGL.pdf>

Measuring spirituality and gauging faith is a precarious exercise. Numbers do not necessarily reflect spiritual authenticity. Yet, we can observe a certain process of conversion occurring within Ukrainian society. War accelerates change. President Zelensky, who was a thoroughly secular comedian, has taken on and, in fact, helped bring back into the international discourse a language of principles and values. His statements often include the language of faith. Soldiers and civilians near the front-line always welcome military chaplains. The Churches and religious organizations [with exception of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church associated with the Moscow Patriarchate] have enjoyed high approval ratings in Ukraine. The level of trust in "the Church" in February-March of this year was at 70 percent [the Army is trusted by 96 percent of the population, the President by 83 percent, the parliament by 51 percent].

<https://credo.pro/2023/03/341940>

There is another measure of faith—solidarity.

Ukrainians of all faiths and walks of life pass this test with flying colors. "Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brothers, you did it to me." Matthew 25:40.

After one of my trips to Ukraine, I landed in New York City and was struck by a realization sparked by what I encountered in the Big Apple: The homeless on the streets. In Ukraine I did not see such destitution despite the fact that 14 million people were forced from their homes. Poles, Romanians, Germans, Italians, Canadians, Americans, and people of scores of countries generously have offered hospitality to over 8 million Ukrainians. At the same time, Ukrainians of modest means managed to lodge and otherwise accommodate some 6 million internally displaced persons. One does not see many refugee camps in Ukraine. There are no reports of starvation in Ukrainian-controlled territories. The network of connections and support within society turned out to be stronger than Russian missile attacks, which this past winter were geared to freeze Ukrainian urban populations. Yet nobody froze. Symbolically, the quickly created community shelters where people could get a warm meal, charge their phones, and spend time during the most violent attacks when Russians targeted power plants and electrical grids came to be called "hubs of invincibility."

Today, mutual sacrifice among Ukrainians is a great spiritual testimony. Hundreds of thousands are ready to give their lives and volunteer to join the army, and millions are donating funds to support the defense of the country. In the first year of the full-scale war, more than 33.96 billion hryvnias [one billion USD] have been donated by average Ukrainian citizens to the accounts of the National bank and the country's three largest funds for military support. There are countless smaller funds and ones that focus exclusively on humanitarian aid. The culture of giving has become part of the fabric of Ukrainian society. Almost everyone is involved in contributing to the purchase of vehicles, drones, tourniquets, personal protective gear, and to accommodate those who have lost everything.

In Ukraine, there is faith in action. The four basic principles of the Catholic Church's social teaching: [1.] respect for God-given human dignity, [2.] solidarity, [3.] subsidiarity, and [4.] the pursuit of the common good are manifest in Ukraine's courageous resilience and defense. The Church has played a central role in proposing and inculcating these principles so strongly embraced during the war crisis.

I started with the testimony of Patriarch Josyf that evil would not last forever. It would not if we all continue to confront it resolutely and with critical understanding of the dangers this war brings to the United States and to the world.

Josyf Slipyj was indeed right.

Between 1939 and the mid 1980's, the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church was reduced from almost 3,000 priests to some 300 whose average age surpassed the life expectancy of males in the Soviet Union. Those 300 priests were able to minister to only 1 percent of the pre-World War II Greek Catholic population. In the natural realm, their cause was hopeless. They were destined to die out. Providence had other plans. Today, three decades after the fall of the USSR, the UGCC has revived and has 3,000 priests again. Some of them, like the Redemptorists from Berdyansk, Fathers Ivan and Bohdan, are called to be martyrs. Not necessarily to die or be killed, but to witness. The word "Martyr" derives from the Greek *martyria*, which means *witness*—to stand steadfastly for principles and to be ready to sacrifice for them.

Because evil will not last forever.

Forty years ago, the Helsinki Commission's work contributed to the freedom of the Ukrainian Greek Catholics and to the liberation of many other people of faith who were subject to Soviet communist oppression. These efforts need to be remembered and lauded. They need to continue and intensify in the circumstances of the Russian war against Ukraine and against the international order of democracy, justice, and freedom.

It is essential to monitor closely the consequences of the Russian invasion. The crimes against religious liberty must be identified, fully investigated, and condemned. Concerted effort needs to be exerted to ensure the religious and general freedoms of the people of Ukraine.

Ultimately, they are giving their lives also for ours.

Article

Clergymen or Spies? Churches Become Tools of War in Ukraine

Ukrainian officials are cracking down on a branch of the Russian Orthodox Church that they describe as a subversive force doing the Kremlin's bidding.

By Andrew E. Kramer

Dec. 31, 2022.

KYIV, Ukraine—Andriy Pavlenko, an Orthodox church abbot in eastern Ukraine, seemed to be on a selfless spiritual mission. When war came, he remained with his flock and even visited a hospital to pray with wounded soldiers.

In fact, according to court records, Mr. Pavlenko was working actively to kill Ukrainian soldiers and Ukrainian activists, including a priest from a rival Orthodox church in his city, Sievierodonetsk.

"In the north, there are about 500 of them, with a mortar platoon, five armored personnel carriers and three tanks," Mr. Pavlenko wrote to a Russian officer in March, as the Russian Army was hammering Sievierodonetsk and areas around it with artillery.

"He needs to be killed," he wrote of the rival priest, according to evidence introduced at his trial in a Ukrainian court, showing he had sent lists to the Russian Army of people to round up once the city was occupied. Mr. Pavlenko was convicted as a spy this month and then traded with Russia in a prisoner exchange.

Andriy Pavlenko, who had been working as an Orthodox church abbot in eastern Ukraine, was convicted as a spy this month.

His was hardly an isolated case. In the past month, the authorities have arrested or publicly identified as suspects more than 30 clergymen and nuns of the Ukrainian arm of the Russian Orthodox Church.

To the Ukrainian security services, the Russian-aligned church, one of the country's two major Orthodox Churches, poses a uniquely subversive threat—a widely trusted institution that is not only an incubator of pro-Russia sentiment but is also infiltrated by priests, monks and nuns who have aided Russia in the war.

Recent months have brought a quick succession of searches of churches and monasteries, and decrees and laws restricting the activity of the Russian-aligned church, confusingly named the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the Moscow Patriarchate. On Tuesday, Ukraine's Supreme Court upheld a 2018 law that requires truthful naming of religious organizations if they are affiliated with a country at war with Ukraine—a law tailored to force the church to call itself Russian.

President Volodymyr Zelensky this month asked Parliament to ban any church that answers to Russia, though no details have been proposed yet, so it remains unclear how that would work. The Ukrainian authorities plan to revoke the Russian church's lease on two revered houses of worship—the Holy Dormition Cathedral and the Refectory Church—in the Monastery of the Caves complex in Kyiv, a thousand-year-old catacomb cradling the mummies of the holiest saints in Slavic Orthodoxy.

The Ukrainian crackdown on the Russian church has elicited howls of protest from both the church and the Russian government, which call it an assault on religious freedom. On Tuesday, Metropolitan Pavlo Lebed, the head of the Russian-aligned church at the Monastery of the Caves, appealed to Mr. Zelensky in a video. “Do you want to take away faith in people, take away the last hope?” He said. “Do not tell us which church to go to.”

Mr. Zelensky, who is Jewish, and Ukrainian law enforcement agencies say the crackdown has nothing to do with religious freedom, which they argue does not extend to espionage, sedition, sabotage or treason.

For centuries, Ukraine's Orthodox churches were under the Russian church, whose leadership in Moscow wholeheartedly supports President Vladimir V. Putin's war. In recent years, many priests and parishes, and millions of the faithful, have switched allegiances to the independent new Orthodox Church of Ukraine, a migration accelerated by the war. The two churches are virtually identical in liturgy; what separates them are politics and nationalism.

Early in December, the Ukrainian Orthodox Church called the accusations of collaboration between its clergy and Russia “unproven and groundless.”

The Russian-aligned church, which still represents millions of Ukrainians, insists that it cut ties with its Russian hierarchy at the onset of the war. The independent Ukrainian church calls that break in sincere and flatly condemns its counterpart for not making a real break with Moscow.

“The Russian Orthodox Church is in reality a tool of Russian aggression,” Archbishop Yevstratiy, a spokesman for the Orthodox Church of Ukraine, said in an interview in the St. Michael's Golden Domed Monastery in Kyiv.

Outside military analysts have seen reason for Ukraine's concern. The church of the Moscow Patriarchate “materially supported Russia's annexation of Crimea and the invasion of Eastern Ukraine,” the Institute for the Study of War, a U.S.-based analytical group, wrote in a research note on the role of the Russian-affiliated church in the war.

Evidence of churches being treated as instruments of Russian aims is commonplace. Searches have turned up wads of cash, flags of the former Russian client states in eastern Ukraine and pamphlets printed by the Russian Army for distribution in occupied territories, the Security Service of Ukraine, the domestic intelligence agency, has said in statements.

The archimandrite, or top religious official, of the Assumption Cathedral in Kherson in southern Ukraine attended a ceremony in the Kremlin in which Russia claimed to annex the Kherson province as part of Russia.

During the 8-month Russian occupation of Kherson city, Moscow's forces cracked down on private charities in an effort to steer the population to Russian humanitarian aid programs, which required registration with occupation authorities. It was a policy of forcing dependence on Russia. When a priest nonetheless continued operating a soup kitchen, the Russian-aligned church excommunicated him.

Ukrainian officials say that priests and monks—or people posing as them—who are also spies have caused problems for Ukraine's military. At one monastery north of Kyiv this month, the authorities said they found six men in monks' robes—all of whom were athletically built, spoke Russian but no Ukrainian, and had no documents. The police arrested the men and are investigating whether they are spies.

"Being a priest is ideal cover for any intelligence agent," said a Ukrainian intelligence official knowledgeable about the investigation of the Russian-aligned church, but who was not authorized to speak publicly. "People are ready to trust you, because you are a priest."

For his part, Mr. Pavlenko, the abbot who was later convicted of espionage, took to visiting wounded Ukrainian soldiers at a hospital, according to Pavlo Dubyna, a former resident of the town and acquaintance of Mr. Pavlenko. After such visits, he would walk in the street and speak on his cellphone, Mr. Dubyna said.

Ukrainian authorities arrested the priest in April, when the Russian military was still bombarding Sievierodonetsk, which it captured in June. In an act they say proved Mr. Pavlenko's culpability, Moscow accepted the priest in a prisoner swap for an American held by Russia, Suedi Murekezi, an Air Force veteran who had been living in southern Ukraine before the war.

Evidence from the trial opened a window into the priest's blending of espionage and vendetta against priests in the independent Ukrainian Church, which before the war had been winning away followers from the Russian church. Prosecutors presented what they said were short descriptions of the rival clergy, sent to the Russian Army by Mr. Pavlenko.

"The spiritual guide for the nationalist brigades and the Ukrainian Army in the Luhansk region," said a March 15 note that said the priest in question should be killed.

Another message described another priest in the Ukrainian church whose brother was fighting in the war and said, "I think we need to put an end to him too, as he is not our guy."

Maria Varenikova contributed reporting.

Article

How the Russian Orthodox Church is Helping Drive Putin's War in Ukraine

IDEAS

BY GERALDINE FAGAN APRIL 15, 2022 7:00 AM EDT

Fagan is the author of [Believing in Russia—Religious Policy after Communism](#)

To Vladimir Putin, Orthodox Christianity is a tool for asserting Moscow's rights over sovereign Ukraine. In his February televised address announcing the recent invasion of Ukraine, he argued the inhabitants of that "ancient Russian land" were Orthodox from time immemorial, and now faced persecution from an illegitimate regime in Kyiv.

Led by Patriarch Kirill, the Russian Orthodox Church is one of the most tangible cultural bonds between Russia and Ukraine. The gilded domes of Kyiv's Monastery of the Caves and St. Sophia Cathedral have beckoned pilgrims from across both lands for nigh on a thousand years.

With religious rhetoric, Putin taps into a long tradition that imagines a Greater Russia extending across present-day Ukraine and Belarus, in a combined territory known as Holy Rus'. Nostalgic for empire, this sees the spiritual unity of the three nations as key to Russia's earthly power as an exceptional civilization. Encouraged by Putin's "special operation," Russian Orthodox nationalists are excitedly recalling the prophecy of a twentieth-century saint from Chernihiv, now one of Ukraine's beleaguered cities. "Just as the One Lord God is the indivisible Holy Trinity of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit," this monk fortold, "so Russia, Ukraine, and Belarus together are Holy Rus' and cannot be separated."

Putin is not the first modern Moscow ruler to co-opt this idea in seeking to consolidate secular power. During the darkest hours of World War Two, Stalin reinstated the Russian Orthodox Church—having almost bled it dry—and replaced the communist Internationale with a new national anthem. Its lyrics asserted that the Soviet Union was "unbreakable, welded together forever by Great Rus'."

Around 2007 the Kremlin further advanced the allied concept of *Russky Mir*, or the Russian World, initially a soft power project aimed at promoting Russian culture worldwide and likened by Patriarch Kirill to the British Commonwealth. Putin, however—unsettled by mass protests against his authoritarian regime in 2011–12 as well as those that toppled his vassal in Ukraine in 2013–14—has since twisted both Holy Rus' and the Russian World to serve a more violent agenda.

Outsized emphasis now goes to Russia's tradition of warrior saints. It was by remarkable coincidence, Putin told thousands of flag-waving supporters at a recent Moscow stadium rally, that the military operation in Ukraine commenced on the birthday of Saint Theodore Ushakov, an eighteenth-century Russian naval commander famed for never losing a single battle. "He once said, 'This threat will serve to glorify Russia,'" Putin enthused. "That was the case then, is now, and ever shall be!"

Cast aside is an alternative Christian holy tradition of defiant passive resistance, exemplified by the first saints to be canonized in medieval Rus', the Kyiv princes Boris and Gleb, who accepted martyrdom at the hands of their brother. "They gave up without a fight," Putin once remarked in disgust. "This cannot be an example for us." With the attack on Kyiv's current ruler, even small acts of Christian pacifism by Russians are quashed. A remote village priest was fined hundreds of dollars for publicly refusing to support the war and thus "call black—white, evil—good." A young woman was detained outside Moscow's main Orthodox cathedral for holding up a simple sign bearing the biblical commandment, "Thou shalt not kill."

In this Putin can count on the backing of a body of jingoistic opinion now dominating the Church hierarchy. Flanked by medal-laden Defense Minister Shoigu at the 2020 consecration of a cavernous black and green military cathedral, Patriarch Kirill prayed that Russia's armed forces would never suffer defeat. This March, on the very same spot where Pussy Riot made their infamous protest against cozy Church-Kremlin ties a decade ago, the Patriarch presented an icon to the head of Russia's National Guard—the same unit now reportedly suffering heavy losses in Ukraine—in the hope that this would "inspire new recruits taking their oath."

Kirill is not an outlier in his support for the war, as no senior cleric inside Russia has expressed dissent. "Everything the president does is right," one archbishop told local news agency Regnum in late March. "Speaking as a monarchist, I would personally place a crown upon Putin's head if God granted the opportunity." Similar fervor is found among respected Moscow parish priests. "Russian peacekeepers are conducting a special operation in order to hold Nuremberg trials against the whole of Europe," one preached during a recent sermon, as he denied reports of civilian casualties. "What is the Westable to produce? Only ISIS and neofascism."

This priest concluded his sermon with the hope that Kazakhstan, Moldova, and Georgia would be reunited with Russia, in addition to Ukraine. If Putin is looking to burnish his legacy as gatherer of historical Russian lands, there is a problem. The inhabitants of Ukraine are not interested in being “liberated” by his operation to “de-Nazify” their country. “The Russian World has arrived!” One woman shouted sarcastically as she filmed invading troops facing off against a crowd of angry locals just 20 miles from Ukraine’s eastern border with Russia. “We are not waiting for you, so get out of here!” Within hours of the first missile strikes on February 24, even the the Orthodox Church in Ukraine that is under the Patriarch of Moscow turned indignantly to Putin. “We ask that you stop this fratricidal war immediately,” Metropolitan Onuphry implored. “Such a war has justification before neither God nor man.”

Putin’s is thus a spiritual, as well as military, misadventure. Similar to Stalin’ spivot at the lowest point in World War Two, his reliance upon the Orthodox Church over the last decade smacks of desperation. It hardly stems from personal commitment to the faith: while projected as a believer from the beginning of his presidency, for more than a decade Putin largely rebuffed the Church’s policy goals—such as mandatory classes on Orthodoxy in public schools—until his need for autocratic symbolism prevailed after his return to the presidency in 2011–12. Throughout his rule he has consistently spoken and behaved at odds with normative Orthodox Christian behavior, such as by claiming that choice of faith is unimportant since all religious categories are human invention, or when awkwardly greeting Patriarch Kirill with the gestures reserved for venerating a sacred relic or icon.

Bellicose rhetoric from Orthodox clerics does resonate with some devout Russians, but this is a narrow swath of the population. While a 2019 national poll found that over 60 percent of Russians older than 25 identify as Orthodox, those attentive to institutional Church life—such as by attending Easter worship services—amount to only a few percent. The same poll found a precipitous drop in those identifying as Orthodox among the 18–24 age group—just 23 percent.

This contrasts starkly with Ukraine, where a quarter of the population attends Easter services and a majority of 18–24 year-olds define as believers. Swift and total alienation of millions of Ukrainian Orthodox is a colossal price for Patriarch Kirill to pay for loyalty to Putin, Ukraine being where a third of his parishes and monasteries are located. The Patriarch’s international standing is also shot, as Orthodox abroad not gagged by the Kremlin’s new ban on criticism of the Russian armed forces have condemned the war—including Kirill’s own bishops in Estonia and Lithuania—along with Pope Francis and the Archbishop of Canterbury. Instead of a Russian World, the Moscow Patriarch may soon find his authority stopping at the borders of the Russian Federation.

The Church’s dwindling reach thus means that Putin cannot use it to restore the age-old dream of an expanded Holy Rus’. Approaching 70, however, Russia’s president has no long-term ambition to consolidate Orthodox spirituality—only his personal grip on power for however many more years God grants him.

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