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**STATEMENT BY
MR. ALEKSANDR VOLGAREV, DEPUTY PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF
THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION, AT THE 1487th MEETING OF THE
OSCE PERMANENT COUNCIL**

5 September 2024

**On the religious “war” unleashed by the Kyiv regime against the canonical
Ukrainian Orthodox Church**

Madam Chairperson,

Russia has regularly drawn attention at the OSCE to the worsening situation in the religious sphere in Ukraine, where the representatives of the Kyiv regime have for many years been striving for the total destruction of canonical Orthodoxy. The persecution of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church (UOC) is being carried out there through a smear campaign rolled out by the Ukrainian media. For example, they are brazenly justifying the “voluntary transition” of churches, which in fact means the massive taking over of these by radical nationalists with the complicity of the local authorities, intelligence services and law enforcement agencies. As a rule, these takeovers are accompanied by violence, by beatings meted out en masse to clergy and worshippers. Numerous attempts are constantly being made to seize the biggest monasteries and convents of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church; the monks and nuns living there are being forcibly evicted. Relevant images and video footage can easily be found on the Internet.

The Ukrainian intelligence services are exerting direct pressure on the UOC, its episcopate and lower clergy, including through threats, blackmail and the opening of dozens of politically motivated, trumped-up criminal cases. Many UOC priests are under arrest, have been remanded in custody or have received unfair sentences. In a number of regions and population centres the local authorities have simply banned the Church’s activities; they are forcibly shutting down its places of worship, preventing the conduct of services, and illegally confiscating plots of land on which its monasteries, convents, churches and holy sites are located.

Even so, the Kyiv regime has still not managed to weaken the canonical Church. In this connection, Volodymyr Zelenskyy’s underlings have taken a step that, in terms of sheer scale, may well surpass all previous historical acts of repression against the UOC. On 20 August this year, the Verkhovna Rada (Ukrainian Parliament) adopted, on second reading, the Act on Protection of the Constitutional Order in Regard to the Activities of Religious Organizations. It was signed into law by Mr. Zelenskyy on 24 August. Parts of the Act entered into force on 25 August, and it is expected that as of 23 September it will start to be implemented fully. This instrument makes it possible to prohibit, through the courts, the activity of any religious communities on Ukrainian territory if they are “affiliated” to any religious organizations in Russia.

For a court to issue a ruling to that effect, it will be sufficient if a religious expert assessment has been conducted – in a witch-hunt environment, such assessments can and will be fabricated. In this way, the Kyiv regime has secured for itself the opportunity to realize its long-term plans for banning and eradicating the Ukrainian Orthodox Church from the country's territory.

Among the instigators of this treacherous act we find State officials at the highest level, members of the Verkhovna Rada, far-right politicians and public figures, and representatives of schismatic organizations and the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church. They make no bones about the fact that this law directly targets the canonical Ukrainian Orthodox Church and is aimed at eliminating its places of worship or forcibly transferring these into the hands of other religious organizations. Hundreds of monasteries and convents, thousands of places of worship and millions of Orthodox faithful will thus find themselves beyond the pale of the law; they will lose their property and a space where they can pray.

The supporters of the draft law disregarded the opinion of millions of believers, the position of the UOC itself, the legal community and even the timid criticism from the Zelenskyy regime's foreign patrons. The members of that regime have once again demonstrated their disdain for their own country's citizens, thereby deepening the divide in Ukrainian society, which is already considerable as it is. Evidently, the urge to fulfil a political agenda aimed at destroying an institution which millions of people turn to for solace proved to be stronger for these individuals.

Madam Chairperson,

We are for the first time witnessing a turn of events whereby a prohibition is being imposed in the pan-European space on an entire religious denomination, the rights of millions of believers are being overtly trampled underfoot, and specific international obligations and commitments on freedom of belief, including OSCE commitments, are being audaciously and shamelessly violated. With regard to the OSCE commitments, we are referring, in particular, to provisions in the CSCE Helsinki Final Act of 1975, the CSCE Vienna Concluding Document of 1989 and the CSCE Copenhagen Document of 1990, along with OSCE Ministerial Council decisions adopted in Maastricht in 2003 and, by a bitterly ironic twist of fate, in Kyiv in 2013. In accordance with these documents, the participating States unanimously committed themselves to respecting human rights and fundamental freedoms, including the freedom of thought, conscience, religion or belief; to striving to prevent intolerance and violence on the grounds of religion or belief; to ensuring and facilitating the freedom of the individual to profess and practise a religion or belief, alone or in community with others – if necessary, through the adoption of, *inter alia*, transparent laws, regulations, practices and policies. Moreover, the Act that was adopted in Ukraine is also incompatible with the principle of the rule of law.

We are obliged to note the complete passivity – which no longer comes as a surprise to us – of the Personal Representative of the OSCE Chairperson-in-Office tasked with combating intolerance and discrimination, including against Christians, Ms. Regina Polak. Her egregious silence throughout this whole campaign of repression against the UOC raises questions about her professional competence and fitness for the post she is occupying.

In that regard, we call upon representatives of the relevant OSCE executive structures, above all the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights, to finally give a public response to the ramping up of repression against UOC believers and the destruction of the religious home of the majority, and also to take a firm stand against the religious “war” unleashed by the Kyiv regime against Ukraine's canonical Orthodox Church and its followers.

Thank you for your attention.