



УКРАЇНСЬКА ПРАВОСЛАВНА ЦЕРКВА В КАНАДІ
UKRAINIAN ORTHODOX CHURCH OF CANADA
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To His Excellency,
The Right Honourable Stephen Harper,
Prime Minister of Canada

Regarding Developing Events in Crimea and Ukraine

The Episcopate of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of Canada expresses great concern at the March 18 decision by the Russian parliament to recognize the “independence” of Crimea and to adopt an agreement of annexation of Crimea as well as at the continued Russian military occupation of Crimea, Ukraine. We join Canada and the international community in evaluating such military action, the unlawful Crimean referendum and the Russian parliamentary decision as a threat to the unity and the territorial integrity of the state of Ukraine, which places Ukrainian ethnic identity at risk.

We welcome Canada’s support for the territorial integrity of Ukraine as well as the measures that the Government of Canada has taken in imposing sanctions against Russia and persons of the former regime in Ukraine responsible for the atrocities and unrest. We also welcome Canada’s offers of humanitarian assistance for the victims of the violence and the economic aid extended to the new government to provide stability. We positively greet Canada’s cooperation with the international community and the recent Canadian delegation to Ukraine. We also applaud Your Excellency’s upcoming visit to Kyiv on March 22.

The Episcopate of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of Canada would like to draw your attention to a human rights situation of growing concern in Crimea and other areas of Ukraine following the most recent events occurring in Crimea with its continued military occupation and attempted annexation by Russia via an unrecognized referendum in Crimea. We are disquieted by the overt human rights violations and threats to the safety, security and identity in Crimea towards ethnic Ukrainian residents, the indigenous Tatar population, pro-Ukrainian religious jurisdictions located in the peninsula, journalists and human rights workers.

We wish to cite just a few examples of reports of human rights violations of minorities occurring leading up to and following this unrecognized referendum in Crimea. The Ukrainian media has reported a number of incidents of physical and psychological intimidation of ethnic Ukrainians and those individuals supporting Crimea as part of the Ukrainian state. The Ukrainian language department at a Crimean university has been closed. The day after the referendum Ukrainian state symbols such as flags, trident symbols and other markers of Ukrainian ethnicity were being removed from public buildings. Ethnic Ukrainians and Tatars in Crimea have been warned by aggressive groups of unidentified armed individuals to relinquish their Ukrainian citizenship. Unidentified armed troops have been searching individuals arriving at train stations in Crimea suspecting them of assisting the Ukrainian military. The Ukrainian and foreign press have been harassed and blocked from entering the Crimean peninsula and from freely covering events such as the pseudo-referendum. The head of the Department of Ukrainian Border Guards located in Crimea reported March 17 that the families of Ukrainian border guards have received threats of eviction from the Russian occupiers. Workers on a humanitarian mission to Ukrainian naval bases and to Tatar communities were kidnapped. Following their release, they reported maltreatment and intimidation. On March 18 there was an escalation of violence with Russian military storming a Ukrainian military division point resulting in one death.

Furthermore, we are most troubled by the situation surrounding religious freedoms in Crimea, particularly the fate of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church jurisdictions. Churches and clergy of the pro-Ukrainian jurisdictions of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church-Kyivan Patriarchate and Ukrainian Catholic Church, providing chaplaincy services to Ukraine's military servicemen and ethnic Ukrainian faithful, have been subject to psychological pressure from armed Russian troops. Four Ukrainian Catholic priests were kidnapped and released over the period of March 15-17. As a result, the Ukrainian Catholic Church has evacuated its clergy from the peninsula. The Ukrainian Orthodox Church jurisdictions face having their property *de facto* confiscated. Similarly, the Tatar population faces a proposed Russian ban on Muslim organizations.

In other parts of Ukraine, ethnic Ukrainians are also being targeted by pro-Russia groups. In Kharkiv on March 15, Ukrainian officials reported that a group of pro-Russia demonstrators led by Russian citizens stormed the premises of the Prosvita Society, an organization promoting Ukrainian language and literature, and burned their library of Ukrainian books. A staff member of the pro-Ukrainian Svoboda party was killed during this violence. A leader of the Crimean Tatar nation, speaking at the Ukraine Crisis Media Centre on March 15, warned that such aggressive Russian actions could lead to "ethnocide".

We negatively view these and other incidents of physical and psychological intimidation and harassment of individuals based on their ethnicity and religious affiliation. Only 80 years ago ethnic Ukrainians were the target of a deliberate extermination campaign, the Great Famine, on their own homeland by the Stalinist regime, which Canada has acknowledged as genocide. Stalin

conducted a similar campaign against the Crimean Tatar population at this time by sending them into exile. In our concern for the protection of human life and dignity of all peoples, we wish to avert the potential that such harassment may lead to ethnic cleansing of a type that the world has witnessed in recent armed conflicts.

As such, we are deeply concerned for the future welfare and security of the peaceful citizens in Crimea and elsewhere in Ukraine. We urge the Government of Canada to speak out to protect the human rights of the vulnerable ethnic Ukrainian and ethnic Tatar minorities under occupation in Crimea by Russia. We urge Canada to challenge Russian authorities regarding their intervention in Crimea and treatment of non-Russian ethnicities.

Canada's forward role among G-7 nations has not gone unnoticed by the citizens of Ukraine. Canada's authority as an international leader on human rights has the respect of the citizens of Ukraine. In the aftermath of the violence of February 18, it was announced on the Maidan stage in central Kyiv that Canada took the leading role as the first country to implement sanctions against the former regime. This was met with great appreciation from the hundreds of thousands of people gathered there during this time. The Ukrainian media had reported prominently the visit of the Canadian delegation to Ukraine led by Foreign Minister Baird. These, and the subsequent statements by the Canadian Government regarding the developments in Ukraine and Crimea, received significant coverage in Ukraine's mainstream media. In addition, Canada's efforts have been evaluated positively by Ukrainian citizens in public forums and on social media.

We further urge the Government of Canada to work together with its international allies to press the Russian Government to withdraw its military from Ukraine and to withdraw any territorial claims on Ukrainian territory or towards its citizens. The government and citizens of Ukraine have demonstrated their desire for a peaceful resolution of the crisis through diplomacy and negotiations avoiding violent means. We support these efforts towards a peaceful resolution. We also support efforts made towards building a civil society in the Ukrainian state based on democratic values, dignity of its citizens and respect for human life.

With Hierarchical Blessing,

† *YURIJ, Metropolitan*