

Executive summary

1. Alongside with armed violence the Russian Federation brought abuse of wide specter of human rights to Eastern Ukraine and Crimean peninsula. Among the targets of Russian aggression is religious liberty as a universal human right.
2. United States Commission on International Religious Freedom asserts that Russia not only continually intensified its repression of religious freedom, but also expanded its repressive policies to the territory of a neighboring state, by means of military invasion and occupation. Those policies, ranging from administrative harassment to arbitrary imprisonment to extrajudicial killing, are implemented in a fashion that is systematic, ongoing, and egregious¹.
3. For Russian regime on the annexed Crimean peninsula and pro-Russian regime in occupied territories of Donetsk and Luhansk regions religion start playing a crucial role. State-building processes in so called Luhansk People's Republic/Donetsk People's Republic as well as pro-Russian social changes in Crimea are largely referred to orthodox Christianity of Moscow type. Together with Russian language and centralized autocracy Moscow orthodoxy is claimed to be a social glue for society that Russia and pro-Russian units try to build there. This results in high level oppression against confessions that are different to Moscow Christianity.
4. On May, 2014, the so-called Donetsk Peoples Republic released their so-called constitution, that specifies: "The leading and dominant faith is the Orthodox faith ... as professed by the Russian Orthodox Church (Moscow Patriarchate). The historical heritage and role of the Russian Orthodox Church (Moscow Patriarchate) are recognized and respected, including as a main pillar of the Russian World doctrine."²
5. This doctrine is strongly promoted by the Russian Orthodox Church.³ On August 2014, Patriarch Kirill accused the "uniates" and the "schismatics" [Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church and Protestants respectively] of fighting directly against Orthodox clergy in the east of Ukraine, capturing sacred objects.⁴
6. The occupation authorities conceal the crimes under the guise of law and thus legalize the oppression. The authorities of the self-proclaimed Donetsk People's Republic and Luhansk People's Republic have enact legislation aimed to control activities of religious organizations and to fight against extremism. The laws mimic those of the Russian Federation and serve as a tools for terrorizing religious minorities and for fighting against those who don't support the occupation authorities. Occupied Crimea is de facto governed by Russian legislation.

1 United States Commission on International Religious Freedom, '2017 Annual report', Apr. 2017: page 68, available at: <https://www.uscirf.gov/sites/default/files/2017.USCIRFAnnualReport.pdf>

2 Information portal of DPR, full text in Russian available at: <http://dnrespublika.info/o-республике/konstituciya-doneckojnarodnoj-respubliki/>

3 His Holiness Patriarch Kirill, 'The Russian world is a special civilization that must be preserved', September 8, 2014, available in at: <http://www.patriarchia.ru/db/text/3730705.html>

4 Department for External Church Relations of The Russian Orthodox Church, 'His Holiness Patriarch Kirill urged the Primates of the Local Churches to have their say in defense of the Orthodox Christians of Eastern Ukraine', september 14, 2014, available at: <https://mospat.ru/ru/2014/08/14/news106782/>

7. The Russian Orthodox Church has officially denied any role in the turmoil in Ukraine. However evidence of close ties between the Moscow Patriarchate and the pro-Russian cause has accumulated since the pro-Russian combatants took over Ukrainian territories in the east in the spring of 2014. This includes participation of Russia backed separatists, who use the canonical orthodoxy in their rhetoric and proclaim themselves to be defenders of Christianity and of the Russian World. Clergy of Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the Moscow Patriarchate provide support its premises as living quarters for the militants⁵, promote the idea that Ukraine does not exist as a legitimate state⁶, bless the fight against the “sinners”, “schismatics” and “American agents”.⁷

8. The militants chose for attack members of any denomination different from Moscow Patriarchate.

i) In March 2014, local pro-Russian combatants vandalized the tent, that was set up by the worshipers and pastors of some 60 local churches of different denominations (in exception for the Moscow Patriarchate clergy) united to form the Donetsk Council of Churches. Combatants attacked and threatened clergymen with violence and called them “uniates”, “schismatics” and “satanists”. On May 23, Serhiy Kosiak, a local Protestant pastor was detained and brutally beaten, allegedly for his pro-Ukrainian stance.⁸ Another organizers of the Prayer Marathon, pastor Aleksander Khomchenko, was kidnapped on August 8, 2014, and tortured after leading a prayer on the city’s Constitution Square.

ii) Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church is often accused to be a sect on the separatist-controlled territories of Donetsk and Luhansk regions. On January 29, 2016, the separatist authorities organized a protest campaign against Ukrainian Greek Catholics in Donetsk. The church was blamed for funding from CIA, for assistance to Armed Forces of Ukraine and brainwashing of young people⁹.

iii) On July 4, 2014, Father Tykhon (Serhiy) Kulbaka was abducted. He was blindfolded for the remainder of his ten days in captivity, subjected to mock execution. The priest was denied the medicine necessary to treat his diabetes, which resulted in serious health complications.¹⁰

5 Unian Information agency, ‘Militants in Slavyansk are sheltered in the local Orthodox center’, April, 2014, available at: <https://www.unian.net/politics/908218-boevikov-v-slavyanske-priyutili-v-mestnom-pravoslavnom-tsentre-shtepa.html>

6 Center for Civil Liberties and International Partnership for Human Rights, ‘When god becomes the weapon: Persecution based on religious beliefs in the armed conflict in Eastern Ukraine’, April 2015, page 11, available at: https://iphronline.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/07/when_god_becomes_the_weapon_may2015.pdf

7 Center for Civil Liberties and International Partnership for Human Rights, ‘When god becomes the weapon: Persecution based on religious beliefs in the armed conflict in Eastern Ukraine’, April 2015, page 10, available at: https://iphronline.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/07/when_god_becomes_the_weapon_may2015.pdf

8 Center for Civil Liberties and International Partnership for Human Rights, ‘When god becomes the weapon: Persecution based on religious beliefs in the armed conflict in Eastern Ukraine’, April 2015, page 11, available at: https://iphronline.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/07/when_god_becomes_the_weapon_may2015.pdf

9 Institute for Religious Freedom, ‘Freedom of religion at gunpoint: Russian terror on the occupied territories of Eastern Ukraine’, Kyiv, 2018, page 11, available at: <https://irf.in.ua/files/publications/2018.10.24-IRF-Report-UKR.pdf?fbclid=IwAR3AObq7Q3RiwHWMTCoG20p0SMXx9eALRP5GS9hLD8o6kLDVst9L8Enmt-E>

10 Institute for Religious Freedom, ‘Freedom of religion at gunpoint: Russian terror on the occupied territories of Eastern Ukraine’, Kyiv, 2018, page 14, available at: <https://irf.in.ua/files/publications/2018.10.24-IRF-Report-UKR.pdf?fbclid=IwAR3AObq7Q3RiwHWMTCoG20p0SMXx9eALRP5GS9hLD8o6kLDVst9L8Enmt-E>

iii) Victor Vonsovych, priest from Horlivka, was arrested and held captive for ten days. Upon release, he was threatened with execution should he ever return to Horlivka.¹¹

v) Polish Catholic priest Pavel Vitek was abducted and spent a day in the basement of the Security Service building.

vi) On the 9th of March, 2014, several hundreds of pro-Russian activists approached priest 156REL8 in Pokrovsk and shouted aggressively towards him and other participants taking part in public praying.

vii) Stepan Meniok, exarch priest of Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church, was illegally imprisoned in 2014 in Donetsk. He was accused to be a USA spy. Before this his house was looted and his car was expropriated.

viii) Priests Mykhailo Zavorchuk and Ivan Talailo were illegally detained. The priest Ivan Talailo was tortured with electricity and the priest Mykhailo Zavorchuk was forced to look at the torture.

viii) On the territory of the so-called Donetsk People's Republic, the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church can not be re-registered according to the so-called local law. Parishes of Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church in Makiivka was closed. Same with parishes in Zuhres, Khrustalny (former Krasnyi Luch), Dokuchaivsk.

x) On May 15, 2014, the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of Kyiv Patriarchate made official statement "about numerous facts of threats to life and health of clergymen and those who are faithful, about intentional obstacles to the Church's activities".¹² Armed people intruded temples and requested the clergymen to become subordinate to the Moscow Patriarchate, declared "death sentences". On the currently occupied territory 30 of the 40 parishes of Kyiv Patriarchate have stopped operating¹³.

xi) In May 2014 in Sloviansk Russian Cossacks seized the property of the Ukrainian Orthodox church of the Kyiv Patriarchate on Karl Marx Street. The local head of the church, Archimandrite Savva left the city after his name appeared on the "execution lists".¹⁴

xii) Priest of the Kyiv Patriarchate Alexander Shkumat from the Novoazovskiy district has faced numerous threats, his house was ransacked, church was attacked by gunfire, and the icons, literature and paraphernalia were burned in the churchyard.¹⁵

xiii) Priests Aleksander Shumin and Valeriy Lotorev were abducted and brutally beaten. Priests Pavel Minkov and Yuriy Ivanov were kidnapped and subjected to forced labor at the camps of pro-

11 Institute of Religious Freedom, 'Chronicle of terror: Religious persecution by pro-Russian militants in east Ukraine', Kyiv, Ukraine, August, 2014, available at: https://www.irf.in.ua/eng/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=421:1&catid=34:ua&Itemid=61

12 Ukrainian Orthodox Church of Kyiv Patriarchate, 'Official statement', May 15, 2014, available at: <http://www.cerkva.info/uk/news/patriarkh/4852-synod-documenty.html>

13 As of February 2015, at the time of interview with Serhiy Gorobtsov

14 Center for Civil Liberties and International Partnership for Human Rights, 'When god becomes the weapon: Persecution based on religious beliefs in the armed conflict in Eastern Ukraine', April 2015, page 15, available at: https://iphronline.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/07/when_god_becomes_the_weapon_may2015.pdf

15 Center for Civil Liberties and International Partnership for Human Rights, 'When god becomes the weapon: Persecution based on religious beliefs in the armed conflict in Eastern Ukraine', April 2015, page 15, available at: https://iphronline.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/07/when_god_becomes_the_weapon_may2015.pdf

Russian forces. Chaplain Valentin Serovetskiy was detained in July 2014 and held captive for two months in Luhansk. He was beaten, forced to dig trenches and mass graves. He sustained broken ribs and has contracted Hepatitis C.¹⁶

xiii) The occupation authorities in Donetsk and Luhansk regions perceive the evangelical Christians as western spies, agents of the CIA or the Security Service of Ukraine. Local communities have to gather secretly without public announcements of places for their meetings. Any street activities, public prayers, preaching or distributing Christian literature are dangerous to have.

xv) On June 8, 2014, in Sloviansk, pro-Russian gunmen detained four members of Transfiguration church: the pastor's adult sons Reuben Pavenko and Albert Pavenko and two of the church's deacons, Viktor Bradarsky and Vladimir Velichko. The men were taken to the former offices of the Security Service of Ukraine in Sloviansk, brutally beaten and killed.¹⁷

xvi) In late April and early May of 2014, pro-Russian troops led by Igor Girkin broke into the Kind News church in Sloviansk. An Orthodox priest declared that the church shall be Orthodox. Up to 100 militants stayed inside and shelled Ukrainian forces' positions from church territory.¹⁸

xvii) On August 12, 2014, 158REL8, a priest of the Evangelist Baptist Church, was captured in Khrustalnyi (former Krasnyi Luch). Militants beat him, threatened with a knife, burnt him with cigarettes, stroke with machine guns, tried to pull his teeth out. The militants did not give him food on a regular basis, held mock executions every day, until he was released on the fourth day due to the separatist's top military interference.

xviii) On July 3, 2014, 159REL8, a priest of the protestant church, was captured by pro-Russian militants in suburbs of Sloviansk. He was accused of a "wrong" belief, and subjected to psychological pressure and threatening.

xviii) On June 14, the Torez premises of the Evangelical Church were captured by Cossack battalion. The militants threatened the believers and the clergy, and insisted that Evangelism is a sect religion.¹⁹ Pastor Nikolai Kalinichenko was detained and warned that if he were to continue his religious activities he would be shot.

xx) The Seventh Day Adventist Church in Debaltseve was almost destroyed in the artillery crossfire at the end of July 2014 after pro-Russian fighters stationed themselves 50 meters away from the church.²⁰

16 Center for Civil Liberties and International Partnership for Human Rights, 'When god becomes the weapon: Persecution based on religious beliefs in the armed conflict in Eastern Ukraine', April 2015, page 16, available at: https://iphronline.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/07/when_god_becomes_the_weapon_may2015.pdf

17 Center for Civil Liberties and International Partnership for Human Rights, 'When god becomes the weapon: Persecution based on religious beliefs in the armed conflict in Eastern Ukraine', April 2015, page 16, available at: https://iphronline.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/07/when_god_becomes_the_weapon_may2015.pdf

18 Center for Civil Liberties and International Partnership for Human Rights, 'When god becomes the weapon: Persecution based on religious beliefs in the armed conflict in Eastern Ukraine', April 2015, page 17, available at: https://iphronline.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/07/when_god_becomes_the_weapon_may2015.pdf

19 Center for Civil Liberties and International Partnership for Human Rights, 'When god becomes the weapon: Persecution based on religious beliefs in the armed conflict in Eastern Ukraine', April 2015, page , available at: https://iphronline.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/07/when_god_becomes_the_weapon_may2015.pdf

20 Religion in Ukraine, 'In Donetsk region, for the first time during the armed conflict, the Adventist prayer house was destroyed', July 31, 2014, available at: https://www.religion.in.ua/news/ukrainian_news/26494-na-donetchine-pervyye-za-vremya-vooruzhennogo-konflikta-razrushen-molitvennyj-dom-adventistov.html

xxi) On September 27, 2014, militants forced their way into the Seventh Day Adventist church in Horlivka. They stopped the mass and told the congregation to leave, explaining that “this is Orthodox land and there is no place for sects”. The pastor, Serhiy Litovchenko, was captured and detained for 20 days.²¹

xxii) In August 2014, during a service at the Pentecostal church in Donetsk, pro-Russian gunmen ordered a halt to the service and forbade the congregation to return back to the church ever.²²

xxiii) The majority of Baptist churches were appropriated by the pro-Russian battalions across the occupied territories of Luhansk and Donetsk. The buildings are being used as camps.²³

xxiiii) In October 2014, armed gunmen took over the premises of the Church of Christ in the Petrovsky district of Donetsk. The commanding fighter of the battalion accused the leaders of the church and the congregation of collaborating with the Americans and stated that, “We only support the Orthodox Church and your Protestant churches shouldn’t be here”.

xxv) On 17 June 2014 pro-Russian battalion “Vostok” stormed the Evening Light Christian Rehabilitation Center in Donetsk and kidnapped 27 people.²⁴

xxvi) On 26 June 2014 militants searched and looted the Evangelical Church of Victors in Druzhivka, and held pastor Pavlo Lisko and his wife captive for a week.²⁵

xxvii) On September 27, 2015, in the city of Dovzhansk militants arrested Taras Sen, pastor of the local Pentecostal community. The occupation authorities accused him of cooperating with representatives of the OSCE Special Monitoring Mission.²⁶

xxviii) August 2018, in a courthouse children camp of the Ukrainian Pentecostal Church, three of the clergymen were arrested by occupation authorities, accused in sabotage, interrogated, threatened, brutally beaten, and then released.²⁷

xxix) On July 26, 2018, the so-called Ministry of State Security of the Luhansk People's Republic's banned the Evangelical Baptist Union of Ukraine. The religious organization was called "extremist", and its activities were described as "destructive".²⁸

21 The official website of Seventh Adventists Church in Ukraine, ‘Armed men in Horlivka kidnapped an Adventist pastor from a prayer house during the Eucharist’, September, 2014, available at: <http://logosinfo.org/2014/09/29/vooruzhennye-lyudi-v-gorlovke-poxitili-adventistskogo-pastora-iz-molitvennogo-doma-vo-vremya-svyatogo-prichastiya/>

22 VICE News, report ‘Secret Protestant Churches in Donetsk: Ukraine's Religious War’, March, 2015, available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mhEe2PSaEW0>

23 VICE News, report ‘Secret Protestant Churches in Donetsk: Ukraine's Religious War’, March, 2015, available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mhEe2PSaEW0>

24 News of christian world, ‘Militants of the Vostok battalion attacked the Donetsk rehabilitation center and kidnapped 27 people’, June 18, 2014, available at: <http://prochurch.info/index.php/news/more/29609>

25 Center for Civil Liberties and International Partnership for Human Rights, ‘When god becomes the weapon: Persecution based on religious beliefs in the armed conflict in Eastern Ukraine’, April 2015, page20, available at: https://iphronline.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/07/when_god_becomes_the_weapon_may2015.pdf

26 Institute for Religious Freedom, ‘Pro-Russian militants released Pentecostal pastor Taras Sen from captivity in Luhansk region’, October 5, 2015, available at: https://www.irf.in.ua/eng/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=440:1&catid=34:ua&Itemid=61

27 Institute for Religious Freedom, ‘Freedom of religion at gunpoint: Russian terror on the occupied territories of Eastern Ukraine’, Kyiv, 2018, page 10, available at: <https://irf.in.ua/files/publications/2018.10.24-IRF-Report-UKR.pdf?fbclid=IwAR3A0Bq7Q3RiwHWMTCOG20p0SMXx9eALRP5GS9hlD8o6kLDVst9L8Enmt-E>

xxx) On July 6, 2018, the New Life protestant Baptist church in Makiivka, Donetsk region, was expropriated.²⁹

xxxi) Winners protestant church³⁰ in Druzhkivka (Donetsk region) and church's rehabilitation facility's buildings were searched on mid-June and at the beginning of July, 2014. Militants expropriated car of a witness 162REL8, money and technical items from the church building, and took him and his wife as hostages.

xxxii) 41 members of Jehovah's Witnesses were kidnapped by the occupation authorities in Eastern Ukraine and subjected to violence.³¹

xxxiii) On August 4, 2017, armed militants intervene the liturgy of Jehovah's Witnesses in the Alchevsk in Luhansk region and the city of Luhansk and discovered leaflets with calls about the authorities of the Luhansk People's Republic. Presumably the so called security officers brought the materials themselves. Later this became the reason for prohibition of the activities of Jehovah's Witnesses on the occupied territory of the Luhansk region.

xxxiiii) In 2014 and early 2015 occupation authorities seized 12 Kingdom Halls that belonged to the Jehovah's Witnesses.³²

xxxv) On August 8, 2014, 163REL8, a member from International Society for Krishna Consciousness in Luhansk was detained, beaten, tortured with electricity, also his toe nails were pulled off. He was released on September 2014, after he signed a paper that he want to be baptized.

xxxvi) The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints or Mormon Church has disappeared from the occupied territory, as a result of hostility towards this denomination caused by its American origin, as well as a result of its all buildings seizure.³³

xxxvii) On June 28, 2018, the al-Amal mosque in Donetsk was raided, prayer books and other religious literature were seized. The imams and parishioners were taken for interrogation.

xxxviii) On May, 2016, religious literature of Religious Administration of Muslims of Donbas was recognized as extremists. All Muslim community's activities were banned.

28 Institute for Religious Freedom, 'Freedom of religion at gunpoint: Russian terror on the occupied territories of Eastern Ukraine', Kyiv, 2018, page 10, available at: <https://irf.in.ua/files/publications/2018.10.24-IRF-Report-UKR.pdf?fbclid=IwAR3AObq7Q3RiwHWMTCoG20p0SMXx9eALRP5GS9hID8o6kLDVst9L8Enmt-E>

29 Christian Megaportal 'Invictory', 'The authorities of the unrecognized DPR seized the premises of the Protestant church in Makiivka', June 09, 2018, available at: <https://www.invictory.org/news/persecutions/10397-vlasti-nepriznannoj-dnr-zahvatili-pomeshhenie-protestantskoj-tserkvi-v-makeevke>

30 "Победители"

31 Institute for Religious Freedom, 'Freedom of religion at gunpoint: Russian terror on the occupied territories of Eastern Ukraine', Kyiv, 2018, page 12, available at: <https://irf.in.ua/files/publications/2018.10.24-IRF-Report-UKR.pdf?fbclid=IwAR3AObq7Q3RiwHWMTCoG20p0SMXx9eALRP5GS9hID8o6kLDVst9L8Enmt-E>

32 Center for Civil Liberties and International Partnership for Human Rights, 'When god becomes the weapon: Persecution based on religious beliefs in the armed conflict in Eastern Ukraine', April 2015, page 16, available at: https://iphronline.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/07/when_god_becomes_the_weapon_may2015.pdf

33 Institute for Religious Freedom, 'Freedom of religion at gunpoint: Russian terror on the occupied territories of Eastern Ukraine', Kyiv, 2018, page 10, available at: <https://irf.in.ua/files/publications/2018.10.24-IRF-Report-UKR.pdf?fbclid=IwAR3AObq7Q3RiwHWMTCoG20p0SMXx9eALRP5GS9hID8o6kLDVst9L8Enmt-E>

xxxix) On June 4, 2019, the Akhat' Dzhami mosque in Donetsk was attacked with 82mm mortar bombs to bring discredit to Armed Forces of Ukraine.³⁴

9. Conclusions. Territories that are out of Ukrainian government's control are a place where members of all religions and denominations except Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the Moscow Patriarchate are subjected to systematic oppressions. Part of the crimes are disguised as campaigns against extremism, part results from authorities' connivance, part are disguised as legislation. Most of the crimes may be qualified as violation of art. 9 of European convention on human rights³⁵ and art. 18 of Universal Declaration of Human Rights.³⁶

34 See Truth Hounds' 'Attack on Akhat' Dzhami mosque (Donetsk). Analytical survey.'

35 European Convention on Human Rights, 1950, available at:
https://www.echr.coe.int/Documents/Convention_eng.pdf

36 Universal Declaration of Human Rights, 1948, available at:
https://www.un.org/en/udhrbook/pdf/udhr_booklet_en_web.pdf