

**Notice:** Undefined index: et\_header\_layout in /home/hrwfe90/domains/hrwf.eu/public\_html/wp-content/plugins/pdf-print/pdf-print.php on line 1214

**Notice:** Trying to access array offset on value of type null in /home/hrwfe90/domains/hrwf.eu/public\_html/wp-content/plugins/pdf-print/pdf-print.php on line 1214

**Notice:** Undefined index: et\_header\_layout in /home/hrwfe90/domains/hrwf.eu/public\_html/wp-content/plugins/pdf-print/pdf-print.php on line 1215

**Notice:** Trying to access array offset on value of type null in /home/hrwfe90/domains/hrwf.eu/public\_html/wp-content/plugins/pdf-print/pdf-print.php on line 1215

**Notice:** Undefined index: et\_template in /home/hrwfe90/domains/hrwf.eu/public\_html/wp-content/plugins/pdf-print/pdf-print.php on line 1216

## **RUSSIA-UKRAINE: Religious freedom under threat because of the war**

### **USCIRF warns of potential for religious oppression in Ukraine**

USCIRF (16.03.2022) – <https://bit.ly/3Iq9o9k> – The United States Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF) is appalled by the incalculable suffering already caused by Russia's brutal invasion of Ukraine, and warns that religious communities across Ukraine will likely be targeted with violence and oppression under any Russian influence.

*"We are horrified by Russia's attacks on Ukraine, the senseless loss of life, and the lack of respect for human rights. There is a direct relationship between religious freedom violations and the dismantling of civil society in and by Russia. The Russian government uses distortions of religious history to support its claim that Ukrainians have no independent ethno-religious identity or state tradition,"* said USCIRF Commissioner **James W. Carr**. *"In 2019, the Ecumenical Patriarch of Constantinople recognized an independent Orthodox Church of Ukraine, allowing many parishes previously under the jurisdiction of Moscow to sever those ties in a move that infuriated Russian nationalist sentiments. These parishes and their leadership are in jeopardy if Russian control expands."*

For years, USCIRF has documented Russia's increasingly authoritarian policy towards religion and warned of its troubling implications for Russian society and beyond.

*"In the areas of Ukraine already occupied by Russia in 2014, we have seen the Russian government use baseless charges of religious extremism and terrorism to silence dissent, justify endless raids and mass arrests, and close religious institutions that do not conform to its narrow interpretation of 'traditional' religion,"* said USCIRF Commissioner **Khizr Khan**. *"Indigenous Crimean Tatar Muslims—who oppose the Russian occupation of their homeland—are routinely charged with terrorism based on their ethno-religious identity rather than any substantive evidence. Many of these individuals receive prison sentences of up to 20 years. The Russian government's aggression toward religious freedom is an indicator that much worse will follow, as we certainly see a risk of this pattern being repeated as Russia expands into Ukraine."*

Russian shelling has already damaged numerous religious buildings, including a revered 16 century Orthodox **monastery** where close to 1,000 civilians were sheltering, and a **mosque** in Mariupol where 80 civilians were sheltering. Although some Russian Orthodox clergy oppose the

war, including nearly 300 who signed an **open letter** denouncing it, Russian Orthodox Patriarch **Kirill** has publicly blessed it and provided supposed religious justification.

USCIRF has documented and explained the Russian government oppression of religious freedom in numerous products, including reports on **The Anti-cult Movement and Religious Regulation in Russia and the Former Soviet Union** and **Religious Freedom Violations in the Republic of Chechnya**, and episodes of the USCIRF Spotlight podcast, such as Implications of Russia's Invasion of Ukraine – Part 1: **The “Denazification” Narrative** and Part 2: **The Religious Regulation Framework**, and the **Abuses of Traditional Religion in Russia**. In its 2021 **Annual Report**, USCIRF again recommended that the U.S. Department of State designate **Russia** as a Country of Particular Concern (CPC) for its systematic, ongoing, and egregious religious freedom violations. On November 15, 2021, the State Department **implemented** this recommendation and designated Russia as a CPC for the first time.

[Further reading about FORB in Russia on HRWF website](#)

[Further reading about FORB in Ukraine on HRWF website](#)

**Notice:** Undefined index: `et_footer_layout` in `/home/hrwfe90/domains/hrwf.eu/public_html/wp-content/plugins/pdf-print/pdf-print.php` on line **1266**

**Notice:** Trying to access array offset on value of type null in `/home/hrwfe90/domains/hrwf.eu/public_html/wp-content/plugins/pdf-print/pdf-print.php` on line **1266**

**Notice:** Undefined index: `et_footer_layout` in `/home/hrwfe90/domains/hrwf.eu/public_html/wp-content/plugins/pdf-print/pdf-print.php` on line **1267**

**Notice:** Trying to access array offset on value of type null in `/home/hrwfe90/domains/hrwf.eu/public_html/wp-content/plugins/pdf-print/pdf-print.php` on line **1267**

**Notice:** Undefined index: et\_template in  
/home/hrwfe90/domains/hrwf.eu/public\_html/wp-  
content/plugins/pdf-print/pdf-print.php on line 1268