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## **UKRAINE: Is the Ukrainian Orthodox Church/ Moscow Patriarchate on the side of Moscow or Kyiv?**

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HRWF (05.05.2022) – The autocephalous Ukrainian Orthodox Church (UOC) in communion with the Patriarchate of Moscow is in a very uncomfortable situation. Over 430 clerics as of 5

**May have signed a petition accusing Patriarch Kirill of support to the Russian World ideology and the war on Ukraine. They are hereby siding with the Ukrainians and with Ukraine.**

They have **“filed a suit”** to the highest church judicial authority calling to condemn the doctrine spread by the Russian Orthodox Church and its heretical leader – Patriarch.

The head of the UOC, Metropolitan Onufriy is embarrassed by such a situation and did not enter into conflict with them, avoiding an open schism, but for how long. Indeed, at any time, they might drag their parishes into the Orthodox Church of Ukraine (OCU), recognized by the Ecumenical Patriarch of Constantinople since 2018, and hereby weaken the UOC.

Metropolitan Onufriy has opted for a very diplomatic attitude because in addition, there was a legislative threat of the UOC to be banned by the Ukrainian Parliament. As the Union of Orthodox Journalists in Ukraine has said in a long article, the UOC is helping ALL Ukrainians who are victims of the conflict. Here are concrete actions showing their Ukrainian patriotism that are listed in the article of Konstantin Shemliuk *“Is the Church being dragged into internal strife of security forces?”*.

Union of Orthodox Journalists (02.05.2022) – <https://bit.ly/3FeL4HF> – Since the outbreak of the war in Ukraine, the Ukrainian Orthodox Church has clearly and unambiguously articulated its attitude to the events. For example, His Beatitude Metropolitan Onuphry was the first religious leader in the country to call the war a sin and to

compare the Russian military action against Ukraine to the sin of Cain. Besides, many UOC spokespersons and officials condemned the war.

Two dozen eparchies of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church have stopped commemorating the name of Patriarch Kirill at all services, thereby expressing their disagreement with his position on the war in Ukraine. At the same time, the UOC is very actively involved in volunteer work, using all its resources for humanitarian aid to people and regions affected by the war.

It is the priests of the UOC who have rescued several thousand people from shelling. For example, Deputy Minister of Internal Affairs of Ukraine Anton Gerashchenko said that Archpriest Boris Kovalchuk, rector of the Church of the Great Martyr Demetrius of Thessaloniki in the village of Pilipovichi, helped evacuate over 1,500 civilians during the occupation of the Borodianka district. Archpriest Andrei Pinchuk, a cleric of the Dnipropetrovsk eparchy of the UOC, together with a team of like-minded people saved 725 children from shelling (data as of March 13).

Metropolitan Luke of Zaporizhzhia and Melitopol personally accompanied fifteen buses with evacuees from Mariupol. In response, Alexander Starukh, chairman of the Zaporizhzhia RMA, thanked the bishop and noted: "If you hadn't gone, things would have been much worse... The children, most importantly, were taken away. Thank you."

Furthermore, His Beatitude Metropolitan Onuphry said that *"the Ukrainian Orthodox Church, through the efforts of the episcopate, clergy, monks and believers, is ready to organize a prayer procession from the town of Orikhiv, Zaporizhzhia region, to the Azovstal steelworks in the city of Mariupol to provide emergency aid and withdraw civilians. The procession could also take out the wounded military and pick up the bodies of the dead"*. It later became known that the UOC

Primate blessed several dozen clergymen who went to Mariupol in order to carry out this mission.

It would not be out of place to say that a great number of UOC believers defend Ukraine with weapons in their hands on the front lines. Almost every day in temples of the UOC they hold memory services for the dead soldiers, most of whom were its parishioners. On 17 April 2022, Metropolitan Luke received the news about the death of his brother Alexander Kovalenko, who was killed in the line of military duty. In other words, today it is quite clear that the Church, for its part, is doing everything possible to ensure that the Ukrainians have a peaceful sky over their heads as soon as possible

*Photo: Are law enforcers trying to use priests in internal confrontation? Photo: UOJ*

**Further reading about FORB in Ukraine on HRWF website**

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