

# Ukraine Religious Freedom Act

*A bill to oppose violations of religious freedom in Ukraine by Russia and armed groups commanded by Russia*

USCIRF (16.12.2019) – <https://bit.ly/2EzZp0x> – The U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF) welcomes the introduction of the Ukraine Religious Freedom Support Act (H.R. 5408), which calls on the President to take into account Russia's religious freedom violations in Russia-occupied Crimea and Russia-controlled Donbas when determining "country of particular concern" (CPC) designation under the International Religious Freedom Act. The bill also urges the U.S. government to place visa sanctions on Russian officials responsible for these violations, along with their families.

*Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States of America in Congress assembled,*

## **SECTION 1. SHORT TITLE.**

This Act may be cited as the "Ukraine Religious Freedom Support Act".

## **SEC. 2. FINDINGS.**

Congress makes the following findings:

(1) Russia invaded the Crimea region of

Ukraine in February 2014, continues to occupy and control that region, and has exercised control over part of the Donbas region of eastern Ukraine since April 2014 through non-state armed groups and illegal entities it has established, instigated, commanded, and supported, including with military

and intelligence personnel on the ground from Russia, such as the self-proclaimed Donetsk People's Republic and the Luhansk People's Republic.

(2) International humanitarian law, including the Geneva Conventions, to which Russia is a signatory, requires Russia to respect and protect the religious freedom of the inhabitants of the territory it occupies and controls, or controls through organized non-state armed groups it commands, and holds Russia responsible for violations of religious freedom in this territory.

(3) According to the Department of State's International Religious Freedom Reports, and other reporting, violations of religious freedom in the Crimea region of Ukraine since Russia invaded and occupied the territory have included abduction, detention and imprisonment, torture, forced psychiatric hospitalizations, fines, restrictions on missionary activities, confiscations of property, including churches and meeting halls, expulsions and obstructions to re-entry, denying registration of religious groups, vandalism, fines, and banning peaceful religious groups, and targeted groups have included Muslim Crimean Tatars, the Orthodox Church of Ukraine, formerly the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the Kyivan Patriarchate, the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church, Protestant Christians, and Jehovah's Witnesses.

(4) According to the Department of State's International Religious Freedom Reports, violations of religious freedom in the part of the Donbas region of Ukraine controlled by armed groups commanded by Russia have included detention and imprisonment, torture, confiscation of property, including churches and meeting halls, physical assaults and threats of

violence, vandalism, fines, restrictions on missionary activities, religious services, ceremonies, gatherings, and literature, and banning of peaceful religious groups, and targeted groups have included the Orthodox Church of Ukraine, formerly the Ukrainian Orthodox Church-Kyiv Patriarchate, the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church, Protestant Christians, and Jehovah's Witnesses.

(5) The International Religious Freedom Act of 1998, as amended by the Frank R. Wolf International Religious Freedom Act, requires the President to—

(A) designate a foreign country as a country of particular concern for religious freedom when its government has engaged in or tolerated particularly severe violations of religious freedom in that country over the previous 12 months;

(B) to take 15 actions, or commensurate actions in substitution, following the designation of a country as a country of particular concern for religious freedom; and

(C) designate a foreign country on a "Special Watch List" when its government has engaged in or tolerated severe violations of religious freedom in that country over the previous 12 months.

(6) On November 28, 2018, the Secretary of State designated Russia on the "Special Watch List".

(7) The National Security Strategy of the United States issued in 2017, 2015, 2006, 2002, 2000, 1999, 1998, and 1997, committed the United States to promoting international religious freedom to advance the security, economic, and other national interests of the United States.

### **SEC. 3. STATEMENT OF POLICY.**

It is the policy of the United States to consider—

(1) any alien who, while serving as an official of the Government of Russia, was responsible for or directly or indirectly carried out particularly severe violations of religious freedom in the territory of Ukraine that Russia occupies and controls, or controls through non-state armed groups it commands, and

(2) the spouse and children, if any, of such alien, to have committed particularly severe violations of religious freedom for purposes of applying section 212(a)(2)(G) of the Immigration and Nationality Act (8 U.S.C. 1182(a)(2)(G)) with respect to any such alien and spouse and children of such alien.

### **SEC. 4. DESIGNATION OF RUSSIA AS A COUNTRY OF PARTICULAR CONCERN FOR RELIGIOUS FREEDOM.**

For purposes of making a determination of whether to designate Russia as a country of particular concern for religious freedom under section 402 of the International Religious Freedom Act of 1998 (22 U.S.C. 6442), the President shall consider any particularly severe violation of religious freedom in the territory of Ukraine that Russia occupies and exercises controls, or controls through non-state armed groups it commands, during the period of time that is the basis for the determination and designation, to be a particularly severe violation of religious freedom that the Government of Russia has engaged in or tolerated.