

March 28, 2023
03/033

Nury Turkel, Chair
United States Commission on International Religious Freedom
732 N. Capitol Street, N.W.
Suite A714
Washington, D.C. 20401

Mr. Chairman:

I write to you as Primate of the Orthodox Church in America, the local, autocephalous Orthodox Church in North America, including the United States of America. The Orthodox Church in America is made up of citizens of the United States, Canada, and Mexico, and encompasses clergy and faithful from numerous ethnic backgrounds. Our parishes and dioceses share in ethnic traditions from many local Orthodox Churches. However, our local Church has a special historical relationship with the holy traditions of Orthodox Christianity originating from the churches of Rus, and the mother city of all the peoples and churches of Rus in general, and of Ukraine in particular, is Kyiv.

Thus it is with special concern that we observe the recent developments in the relationship between the civil authorities of Ukraine and the monastic brethren from the Kyiv Caves Lavra, the motherhouse of monasticism in Rus and in Ukraine in particular.

On behalf of the clergy and faithful of the Orthodox Church in America, I affirm the following. We continue to pray for the people of Ukraine and condemn all violent aggression, including the Russian Federation's invasion of Ukraine's sovereign territory. While recognizing the legitimate need of states to ensure their security, especially in times of war, we also decry restrictions on the religious freedom of any group in Ukraine and especially denounce any generalized religious persecution of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church under His Beatitude Metropolitan Onufriy. We have assured Metropolitan Onufriy, his clergy, and the Ukrainian faithful, who are beset by troubles on all sides, that the Orthodox Church in America stands ready to support the Ukrainian Orthodox Church, both with our prayers and by any other means at our disposal.

We confidently hope that, as the United States continues to provide aid for Ukraine in response to the Russian Federation's invasion, the United States government will do everything in its power to encourage the government of Ukraine to respect fundamental human rights, including that of religious freedom, during this time of conflict.

Sincerely,

Metropolitan Tikhon
Archbishop of Washington
Metropolitan of All America and Canada