

HATE CRIMES IN UKRAINE

EVIDENCE OF HUMAN RIGHTS VIOLATION OF ORTHODOX CHRISTIANS IN UKRAINE

**“FORPOST” ADVOCACY UNION |
NGO PUBLIC ADVOCACY**

This overview is aimed at drawing attention of the world community to the events related to illegal seizures of religious institutions which belong to one of the most numerous Christian denominations in Ukraine – the Ukrainian Orthodox Church.

Sources of human rights violation and their brief description.

According to the Ukrainian legislation in force the state assumed an obligation to repatriate assets of religious organizations that were confiscated from them by the Soviet rule. State authorities had to adopt a resolution on reversion of religious property which used to be owned by a particular denomination in the face of religious organizations being its legal successors. Despite the obligations mentioned above the state didn't fulfill actual reversion of property to the Ukrainian Orthodox Church being a legal successor to the Russian Orthodox Church on the territory of Ukraine. For the most part religious organizations of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church dispose of historic buildings for public worship built in the 18th-19th centuries by virtue of contracts with the USSR state authorities in the 50-60s. As it was mentioned above the authorities weren't able to accomplish due reversion of the property so that religious organizations could register their historical ownership.

After the commencement of military actions in the east of the country the public began to reveal aggressive sentiments towards the Ukrainian Orthodox Church that is canonically interwoven with the Russian Orthodox Church. "Moscow Patriarchate" has been informally tagged to the Ukrainian Orthodox Church to reiterate the link of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church with Russia in a propaganda-like way. Individuals who have vested interest in taking over church property of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church *do* take advantage of the on-going situation. For the last two years numerous illegal seizures of sanctuaries have particularly frequented in Rivne, Volyn, Kherson, Ternopil regions and seizure attempts have been made in Kyiv and Sumy regions. It was boosted by the fact that invaders tend to exploit patriotic sentiments of local residents which have grown into media-ridden hatred towards members of other religious denominations and different viewpoints.

Law-based monitoring of conflicts on the religious ground in Ukraine

At the beginning of 2015 NGO PUBLIC ADVOCACY and FORPOST ADVOCACY UNION conducted a monitoring procedure and made an update on observance of rights and freedoms in the context of religious relationships in Ukraine. In the course of research there were interrogated heads and members of religious communities of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church that fall prey to

persecutions in the country. There were studied conclusions of lawyers and jurists that appeared before the court and were engaged in other proceedings including criminal ones. The advocacy union conducted meetings with the heads of district and state administrations and other governmental officials. Members of the advocacy union were witnesses to the attempts of illegal seizures of sanctuaries and can testify to unlawful actions towards religious communities of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church.

Aim of research

The research was aimed at determining causes of conflicts, factors which influence their development, finding out the response of the power and its efficiency in terms of cessation and prevention of human rights violation.

Civil factors of the conflict

Extremism is born where there is a place for inequality and interest opposition of social groups in economic, social, spiritual, interracial, interreligious and other respects. Escalation of extreme moods in society occurs in the time of exacerbation of historic, geopolitical, social and economic, social and cultural, informational and other contradictions in society. 2014-2015 years were marked by the wave of illegal seizures of sanctuaries that belong to the Ukrainian Orthodox Church. In almost all cases faithful people send a warning to the government about a planned seizure; nevertheless, unfortunately, there is no anticipated efficient response from the state-run public authorities. Church seizure is accompanied by sparkling religious hostility, threats towards faithful people, physical and psychological violence. We have to state with regret that both authorities and even the population is getting used to this reality increasingly losing their hope to seek defense.

Crime scheme

The technology of church seizure involves raiders turning up near a church who then incite local residents using political slogans about “non-patriotism” of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church and stir up religious hostility. The population “stuffed” with anti-church propaganda about alleged “Russian roots” of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church at the background of military developments in the country is ready to support those radically-minded. Hereby the

amount of supporters is not crucial since stirring up the war issue seems enough to sparkle people's emotions. It creates a platform for power confrontation with the involvement of radical ultra-right public organizations – "Svoboda" and "Pravyi Sektor" – which foster physical extrusion of religious communities from their churches. Violators of law disguise their absence of juridical rights by organizing a so-called poll among local residents who have to "correctly" answer the question what confession they would like to have in their village. Normally such an inquiry pretends to look like "referendum"; even though it is considered a formal act, it doesn't include all local residents and is not conducted within a legal procedure stipulated by the Ukrainian legislation. As a rule, people who don't go to church and who hardly know what it is all about take part in such pseudo-referendums. There is a growing incidence when the powers-that-be don't detain violators of law and give their de facto consent or sometimes even compel faithful people to seal sanctuaries. After a religious community under official pressure and that of radicals has been displaced from their sanctuary with the church sealed by the government as a "trade-off" decision, raiders – with impunity and even intimidating local authorities – cut off locks, force the doors open and break into the church. As a result, the church property is hardly returned to its legal owners – communities of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church. In many cases occupants don't even bother to return the property stolen from the church interior for they believe this is their "trophies". European human rights defenders are aware of the prospects of starting a legal action in Ukrainian courts based on numerous resolutions of the European Court of Human Rights. Still, the situation is aggravated by the fact that raiders are particular physical persons wearing balaclavas, carrying clubs and sticks and have to be identified only by the militia. Law enforcement officers hardly ever detain violators. There is also a problem to trace down criminals because it's not clear who actually seize churches due to the fact that the militia doesn't catch "customers" and "performers" of illegal seizures in flagrante. Inefficiency of the power is one of the factors that provokes raiders to illegally take hold of the property of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church and make law-unaware religious communities get stuck in a futile litigation despite an overt crime – plunder. At best law enforcement officers manage to prevent bloodshed. Religious institutions of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church instead of having efficient protection of their rights in case of

criminal acts overt are offered to file suits and wait for years for the “law justice” which people tend to believe less and less given a “blind eye” of the government.

«Hatespeech» - in resolutions of state run public authorities

A case which illustrates an attitude of the government to the religious denomination of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church is that representatives of the elective state body – Ternopil Regional Council – who are supposed to act ethically and within the legislation took the liberty to openly defame the denomination of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church having blamed a centuries-old religious sanctity of the Ukrainian people – the Pochaev Lavolta (Lavra) of the Dormition – in antinational activity. In particular, the state body approved by voting of the deputies the following theses: “The Kremlin occupants are interested, like never before, in splitting Ukraine destroying its territorial integrity. For they feel uneasy when they watch Ukrainians become the nation of courageous and brave people. In order to further undermine our society the occupants create and activate “fifth columns” to serve the neighbouring state. The Pochaev Lavolta of the Dormition, one of the spiritual sanctities of the Ukrainian people, is being intentionally transformed into the focal centre of anti-Ukrainian activity and inter-religious conflict. Under the “canonical” guise the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of Moscow Patriarchy intends to Russify the Ukrainian population assisting occupants.”

Regrettably, this official standpoint of the state body can be interpreted by the population as a flash signal to seize sanctuaries of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church with impunity.

Several facts and evidence

Below is some selected evidence provided by the parties involved in raider events in Western Ukraine. More detailed information is highlighted in an *ad hoc* report of NGOForpost which can be forwarded to you upon your request at our e-mail:

Musorivtsi village, Ternopil region

In this small in amount of residents locality there used to be an old church of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church. Village community by their own efforts managed to build a new sanctuary. Ioann Pyvovarchuk, beneficiary of the parish, supervised the construction process which lasted for 10 years.

While the church was being built there weren't any disputes or misunderstanding between the people. However, once the sanctuary had been erected and the question arisen about its dedication service – it turned the tide. At that moment part of the parish wished the new sanctuary to belong to the Kyiv Patriarchate rather than the canonical Ukrainian Orthodox Church. All in all, members of the only registered parish of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church were able to dedicate the newly built sanctuary as Pokrovsky Church.

On January 3rd 2010 after the Divine Liturgy was over a few dozen of young hefty men led by Mykhailo Holovko, an authorized delegate in Ternopil region of Oleh Tiahnybok, the then candidate for the presidency came from Ternopil accompanied by faction deputies of “Svoboda” pan-Ukrainian organization in Ternopil Regional Council in the face of Mykhailo Tymoshyk, Natalia Mandziuk, Volodymyr Karpinskyi and Sviatoslav Shvets, priest from the Kyiv Patriarchate. As for the congregation, they managed to lock the church door from within.

Then the church assault began. The attackers carrying breakages and axes were trying to force the entrance door of the church open. Simultaneously, they were thundering threats and extremist slogans. Local policemen who were watching this just turned their blind eyes and deaf ears to the barbarous action. On seeing desperate attempts of the raiders to break in militia major Tabaka directed them to the side door of acolyte's section of the church.

The church was being assaulted with the slogans like “moscals must be cut with knives!”, “glory to heroes – death to enemies!” Young muscular guys began to push the side doors, broke the windows and started to hurl burnt items inward the church. The assault was led by Mykhailo Holovko, Ternopil municipal council deputy.

Through the open windows the intruders were beating parishioners, went on breaking the side door. This entire horrible spectacle was being witnessed by law enforcement authorities whose sole response was video recording. After the intruders succeeded in

breaking the side door open they kept on beating the parishioners with sticks.

Under the hit squall the people inside the church were doing their best to cover the broken door. It wasn't until one of the injured parishioners lost her consciousness and the ambulance arrived that the assault diminished. The young men left the church grounds thundering threats to come back with a bigger number of actors and to seize the church for sure at Christmas.

Bashuky village, Ternopil region

A congregation "Parish of St. Archistratigus Michael" from Bashuky village, Kremenets district, Ternopil bishopric of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church has owned and continually used the church as a historical legal successor of the developers of this structure since 1946. Starting from April, 2015 aggressively-minded individuals have repeatedly organized meetings in the village where they required that the "Parish of St. Archistratigus Michael" congregation of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church should leave the church building and transfer it to the denomination of Kyiv Patriarchate. On being refused the raiders resorted to pseudo-juridical procedures in order to pretend they have powers to compulsorily alter confession of the Orthodox Church congregation.

There appeared publications on the site of the nationalist organization "Pravyi Sektor" which said it would "provide assistance" for the Ternopil region villagers who are eager to pass to another denomination and receive tenure of the buildings concerned. Alongside with such publications there were initiated public hearings and disputes in the village, voting by means of collecting signatures on the lists where they raised an ultimate question – "if the villagers want to see in their locality the Ukrainian Orthodox Church or the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of Kyiv Patriarchate. Based on the majority of votes to go to the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of Kyiv Patriarchate raiders began a forceful attempt to seize the church. In particular, on April 26th individuals with aggressive behavior broke into the Orthodox church building during worship, began to swear and interrupted the service demanding to leave the building and crying out provocative slogans. At further Sunday services, in particular, on 3rd, 10th, 17th and 24th of May similar events took place: representatives of the "Pravyi

Sektor” came to the village dressed in camouflage uniforms with sticks and bats and explained their presence with “having to keep the public peace”. Undoubtedly, such a “show of force” was aimed at exercising psychological pressure on parishioners of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church. With such “defenders” in the background aggressively charged local population and furriners were trying to muscle out parishioners from their “legal” premises. In their turn, the Orthodox congregation had to invite faithful people from other communities to come to Bashuky village for common prayer and assistance should there be any raid attempt.

Time and again the congregation of Bashuky village turned to law enforcement authorities who personally witnessed the raid but didn’t take a single action to detain violators of public order. It’s noteworthy that militia started a criminal proceeding upon worship sabotage; however this action not in the slightest bothered the invaders who pursued with their aggressive pressure on villagers, loyal to the Ukrainian Orthodox Church.

Eventually, the raiders made an attempt to reregister a juridical person – i.e. congregation of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church – into a different denomination. According to the statutory documents of the congregation adoption of the resolution on changing denomination and passing under jurisdiction of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of Kyiv Patriarchate can be implemented by means of amending the Statute of the religious community. Such amendments can be made only at parish assembly by the empowered members who meet the criteria stated in the Community Charter.

Hence, nobody else is entitled to make decisions. Still the raiders didn’t bother to observe legal formalities. In particular, having gathered the villagers who are members neither of the religious community of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church nor of the regulatory body of this community – i.e. parish assembly – those individuals wrote minutes and made up a “protocol of parish assembly of the congregation”. By these minutes the religious community allegedly had to pass to another denomination. The documents on status change were submitted to Ternopil Regional State Administration which is currently looking into a possibility to reregister the

congregation of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church into that of Kyiv Patriarchate.

The negotiations of representatives of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church with state authorities, in particular, with the head of Department on Religious Matters of Ternopil Regional State Administration proved the fact that the authorities are put under pressure by the “Pravyi Sektor” which demands to reregister the congregation of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church into denomination of Kyiv Patriarchate. Otherwise it threatens to hold actions and protest rallies near the building of Ternopil Regional State Administration.

Upon that the Bashuky congregation didn't even receive a formal notification concerning the protocol of parish assembly of the congregation about transfer to another denomination. The congregation of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church told the Ternopil Regional State Administration in writing that its administrative body – beneficiary and parish assembly – didn't take any decisions on passing to another denomination while the documents submitted had nothing to do with the congregation of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church. At the same time during the talks the head of Department on Religious Matters referred to “poorly regulated legislation in force” and impossibility to define who exactly had taken a decision about “congregation transfer”. He stated he had to overhaul the documents.

Consequently, there is a risk for the authorities to approve an illegal resolution under the pressure of “Pravyi Sektor” with further power collision in the village and unpredictable effects. Given an official announcement made by the “Pravyi Sektor” this organization intends to offer its “services” on the way to the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of Kyiv Patriarchate in other villages as well, in particular, Kuliky and Kolosovo in Kremenets district of Ternopil region. In case an illegal resolution on reregistration of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church congregation in Bashuky village is adopted by the authorities it's highly probable Ternopil region will be hit by a large-scale power confrontation on the religious ground.

Novostav village, Shumy district, Ternopil region

The parish of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of St. Archistratigus Michael sanctuary in Novostav village was created on 24.09.1991.

The building for public worship was erected in 1865 and has always been owned by the Ukrainian Orthodox Church. By the Order of Ternopil Regional State Administration in 2000 the ownership of the church building in Novostav village was transferred to the parish of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church in Novostav village.

On May 26th 2014 an aggressively behaved group of individuals consisting of strangers, villagers and priests of the so called Kyiv Patriarchate under the guise of worship made an attempt to illegally seize the church building whose authorized owner as it was mentioned above is the parish of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church in Novostav village. They reasoned their actions by the fact that according to the Order of Ternopil Regional State Administration the given parish had been eliminated with the ownership delivered to them.

Illegal church seizure attempts occurred on a regular basis till the issue of illegality of the Order of Ternopil Regional State Administration had been submitted to Ternopil county administrative court.

The case was heard in the court from 11.07.2014 to 11.09.2014. During the proceeding the court of the 1st resort found out a number of law violations by civil servants and state authorities.

Alongside with the trial on August 19th 2014 representatives of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of Kyiv Patriarchate without any permission took off the window glass in the church and illegally went inside. Due to this on 21.11.2014 the worship didn't take place and the sanctuary was sealed. However, despite the ruling of the court on prohibition of any illegal actions as regards the church property the congregation of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of Kyiv

Patriarchate made up their own service schedule, opened the door and had an unauthorized worship.

At present the church hosts alternate worships of the two denominations – the Ukrainian Orthodox Church and the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of Kyiv Patriarchate though the church as it was said before is owned by the parish of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church in Novostav village. The Lviv administrative court of appeal delays handling the church case at the moment.

Butyn village, Zbarazh district, Ternopil region

The parish of St. Archistratigus Michael from Butyn village, Zbarazh district, Ternopil region has existed since 1991 (when Ukraine was proclaimed independent) and appears as a sole legal successor to the rights and liabilities of the parish mentioned. There have never arisen any property disputes or claims since it is the only registered parish in Butyn village.

As a matter of fact, on February 23rd 2014 they began to implement an illegal seizure scenario by means of secret collection of signatures of Butyn villagers and making amendments to the Statute in force of the parish following a familiar practice of illegal seizure in Novostav village.

At first, the conflict of interests was aroused by village head A. Zhyla who behaved in a hostile and aggressive way blaming the beneficiary, father Vitaliy Huriev, for the fact that he prayed for the deceased but didn't mention separately those who had died during Maidan event.

The act of provocation continued until 28.02.2014 when the initiative group of the villagers turned to the parish head and demanded that worships be performed in Ukrainian (*NB* the centuries-long recognized worship language of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church is liturgical Old Slavic). Upon that 7 particularly Ukrainian-conscious villagers even resorted to violence making the residents put their signatures in favor of the Ukrainian language. It's

noteworthy the village gathering that took place on 28.02.2014 and was attended by 160 people didn't keep minutes and the issue of changing the church jurisdiction wasn't discussed then (audiorecord is attached).

On March 7th 2014 aggressively-minded Butyn villagers led by the village council head arrived at Ternopil bishopric demanding to meet with its chief. On the same day there was a gathering on the church grounds at which the demand of aggressive villagers to replace the beneficiary was satisfied and father Volodymyr Slobodian was appointed new beneficiary of the parish. The worships were agreed to be performed in Ukrainian. So the conflict seemed to be exhausted.

On October 5th 2014 on Sunday there began a new round of events when the church was illegally seized by representatives of the so called Kyiv Patriarchate. The entrance to the church was guarded by strange men wearing balaclavas who called themselves "Pravyi Sektor" and barred the parishioners and the senior priest from going inside. Militia tour of duty was quietly watching the whole process. The Sunday worship was eventually sabotaged. After these unlawful actions there were collected over 70 signatures of Butyn residents who testified their loyalty to the canonical Ukrainian Orthodox Church and spoke against conversion to the "Ukrainian Orthodox Church of Kyiv Patriarchate".

To date law enforcement authorities refused to open a criminal case against illegal seizure of the church which belongs to the Ukrainian Orthodox Church because according to them "they didn't find any acts of infringement". This resolution of the authorities which explicitly challenges the rights of the faithful has been litigated for 5 months now. Obviously, the court procrastinates with defending the violated rights of the Orthodox congregation in Butyn village.

Mylcha village, Rivne region

Explanatory memorandum by members of the religious community of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church:

"12.02.2015 in the local House of Culture there was a meeting of villagers where they considered a motion that the land plot occupied

by the building of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church should be transferred to the Kyiv Patriarchy whereas the community should pass into the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the Kyiv Patriarchy (hereinafter referred to as KP). There were about 80 attendees in the House. On this very day from 14:00 to 17:00 an inquiry was made as for belonging of the church building and the land plot to either of the confessions. Voting was conducted by means of ballot cards prepared beforehand which contained the following questions: “Are you in favour of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of Kyiv Patriarchy?”, “Are you in favour of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of Moscow Patriarchy?” To elderly villagers came “authorized delegates” with ballot cards and boxes. It’s noteworthy Mylcha church beneficiary, archpriest Oleksiy Halun emphasized for the participants of the meeting that this inquiry was lawless while its results aren’t legally binding. According to the information available a part of village residents were either not informed about the polling-to-be or consciously refused to participate. In the same village archpriest Volodymyr Hlavatskyi announced that without any permission or agreement from the parish council advocates of the KP Ukrainian Orthodox Church had illegally put a metal lattice on the acolyte room’s door. 26.02.2015 congregation and clergymen were barred from taking part in the church service. The ongoing situation is controlled by village head Mishchuk Y. According to the information supplied by the villagers the community of the KP Ukrainian Orthodox Church submitted the registration documents to the regional council wherein village head Mishchuk Y. was noted as a KP community monitor. Among the documents submitted there was one to testify that the executive committee of Mylcha village council upon the request of village head Mishchuk Y. changed the juridical address Tykha 1 for Tykha 1a – the latter being actually the juridical address of the long-standing community of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church. However, the community members were not informed about this change in the address. 18.03.2015 supporters of the KP Ukrainian Orthodox Church arrived at the church with their own priest and their choir-master from the Kyiv Patriarchy, broke the door locks and had a service. After that they sealed the church again.”

Chudnytsia village of Rivne region

Below is a text of the written application of the head of religious community of St. Paraskeva parish of Rivne bishopric

of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church in Chudnitsa village to law enforcement authorities on the subject of the church service disruption (following the church seizure)

Hoshchany's District (Rayon) Municipal Department
Ministry of Home Affairs Administration, Ukraine
House 11, Zastavye Str., Hoshcha town
Hoshcha rayon, Rivne oblast

Applicants:

1) Religious community
of St. Paraskeva parish of Rivne bishopric of the Ukrainian
Orthodox Church, Chudnytsia village, Hoshcha rayon

Tserkovna Str., Chudnytsia village, Hoshcha rayon, Rivne oblast
35424

2) Ivan P. Yaroshchuk – a physical person – participant of the
church service

8a Shevchenko Str, Zhavriv village
Hoshcha rayon, Rivne oblast

APPLICATION

on starting a criminal proceeding

01.03.2015 a religious community of St. Paraskeva parish of Rivne bishopric, the Ukrainian Orthodox Church, in Chudnitsa village of Hoshcha rayon were having a prayer service with Acathistos to Godmother reading in front of the church that belongs to our community, standing on stairs. Around 12.00 approximately 30 people (out of whom 20 were from Chudnytsia) came up to the congregation. These “visitors” approached us from different sides and began to grab and snatch our clothes, hair, hands, and using physical power they pushed us down off the stairs and pulled away from the prayer venue. The priest who was running the service (father Yuriy Hopanchuk) was pushed away from the service table. There were holy items on the table: the Icon, the New Testament and the Cross. The table was overturned with the items falling onto the ground. As a result, our faithful people were not able to finish

their service: the priest had read the Acatistos up to the 6th song, the congregation were made to leave while the raiders began to break the door locks of the church building by means of the angle grinder.

Based on the evidence laid down,

WE REQUEST:

1. To start a criminal proceeding under Article 180 of the Criminal Code of Ukraine.
2. To call the faithful congregation members who were directly involved in the event in the capacity of witnesses.
3. To grant the above mentioned persons as well as other faithful people who participated in the disrupted service the status of the injured in the criminal case.
4. To grant the religious community as a juridical person the status of the injured in the open criminal proceeding.

I. Yaroshchuk

Head of the religious community

Hodosy village, Rivne region

An application fragment of Acheiropaeic image church beneficiary in Hodosy village to the prosecutor of Rivne oblast

«... On September 20th 2014 I was told there would be a meeting of villagers at 16.00 with the agenda as follows: transfer of our parish to the Kyiv Patriarchy... After the moleben (the prayer service) at 16.00 we began the night vigil at which 50 parishioners gathered. Meanwhile behind the church fence the villagers got together to make for the meeting in the eastern part of the village. After a while several minibuses and cars drove up to the church with old and young people dressed in camouflage suits – from “Pravyi Sektor” and “Svoboda”. On noticing that we went inside the church and locked the door. Hardly had we done it as they started to force the door open, cut off the locks with angle grinders and began to drive the congregation out of the building swearing and yelling. Those who showed resistance were pulled out, beaten and struck with tear gas. Following this “riot” the KP priests entered the church and started their prayer service. All our reports to the militia and state bodies regarding the incident yielded no results. Though our parish has all valid juridical documents, no one even paid attention to that. The so-called gathering of the villagers (local villagers made up just to 20%) was supervised by the head of Rivne rayon state

administration and law enforcement agencies. The Kyiv Patriarchy assures it has nothing to do with the illegal seizure of the church but it's not true because their bishopric secretary Mr. Luchanin pulled our priests out of the church, beat and pushed them. He was stopped personally by the dean archpriest father Valeriy...In view of this dishonourable action the village community inquires if we actually live in a sovereign, independent, democratic country and – what's most crucial – the country with the rule of law?..."

Uhryniv village, Volyn region

The Church of the Exaltation of the Holy Cross in Uhryniv village, Volyn region was built in the 19th century by the confession of the Russian Orthodox Church. The parish of Uhryniv village as a legal successor of the Russian Orthodox Church has been continually using the church since 1946. Despite the fact the parish hasn't received any eviction notice so far they were driven out of the church by local entrepreneur Andriy Turak.

This person is an exclusive owner of most business property in the village and simultaneously he's a deputy of Volyn Regional Council. In fact, his religious preferences were given to a different denomination – the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of Kyiv Patriarchate. A. Turak personally managed "village gatherings" where the church lot was determined without any compliance with regular proceedings.

Afterwards individuals hired by Mr. Turak forced the local congregation out of their church. By seizing the church its beneficiary protopriest Rostyslav Sapozhnyk (local resident) was heavily beaten with a stick resulting in head hematoma.

Despite numerous appeals to law enforcement bodies by parishioners of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church the investigation hasn't been made yet due to the great influence Mr. Turak has on local authorities. At the end of May the problem was exacerbated because A. Turak demanded that father Rostyslav evicts from the house built by the parish of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church.

At the moment protopriest Rostyslav together with his wife and two under-age children are scared of the raid attack on his house and doesn't hope to have local authorities interfere to effectively handle

this issue. Why A. Turak resorts to these actions can be explained by the fact that father Rostyslav Sapozhnyk remains committed to his religious viewpoints and the canonical Ukrainian Orthodox Church having turned down a proposal of A. Turak to pass to the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of Kyiv Patriarchate.

NGO PUBLIC ADVOCACY and NGO Forpost invites to cooperation all individuals concerned with obtaining verified information about the ongoing situation in Ukraine caused by persecutions of Orthodox Christians of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church.

We request everybody to give the best possible coverage of true positions within this discourse and offer the willing human rights watchdogs as well as other organizations and communities to contribute to cooperation in the sphere of rights and freedoms defense in Ukraine. Our capabilities lie in our determination to highlight developments in Ukraine and provide a true verified law-related evaluation for them based on the available evidence of witnesses as well as in-depth analysis of actions taken by the state bodies concerning elimination and prevention of violation of the rule of law by virtue of primary monitoring, in particular.

www.protiktor.com
info@protiktor.com