

"Establishing Religious Freedom Dialogue in Ukraine"
March 1, 2019 - August 31, 2019.

Center for Civil Liberties teamed up with the Institute for Religious Freedom to commence the process of religious freedom discussion in Ukraine. They held two Roundtables to launch a regular dialogue between various religious communities, churches, human rights organizations, academicians and scholars for the purpose of protecting religious freedom in Ukraine and preventing discrimination, intolerance and violence on the basis of religion or faith in all its forms. To implement the initiated platform the organizers facilitated the formation of common positions and possibility to peacefully solve potential conflicts between the aforementioned groups. Several working meetings and a press conference were held throughout the project terms, including the meeting on preparation of the Side-event on HDIM OSCE held in Warsaw, Poland in September 2019; the Ukraine Religious Freedom website is launched.

Project details:

On April 16, 2019, a constitutive meeting of the Religious Freedom Roundtable devoted to the topic "Joint Efforts of the Civil Society to Protect Religious Freedom in the Occupied Territories of Ukraine – the Crimea and Donbas" was held in Kyiv. More than 70 participants representing 31 religious organizations, 24 human rights and other non-governmental organizations, as well as 5 expert-scientists volunteered to participate in the event.

The result of the constitutive meeting was the decision of its participants to establish a permanent Religious Freedom Roundtable in Ukraine to become a platform for a dialogue between the representatives of the civil society, particularly between religious and human rights organizations, including experts and representatives of the relevant bodies of the state and local authorities. Along this, the participants of the Religious Freedom Roundtable adopted the Resolution on the Religious Freedom in the Ukrainian Territories Crimea and Donbas Occupied by the Russian Federation during the constitutive meeting.

The Resolution states that the occupation authorities in Crimea do not recognize freedom of religion, but consider it as a collective category, depending on the level of loyalty towards the Russian authorities. Russian authorities in Crimea continue to persecute Muslims from among Crimean Tatars, the Orthodox Church of Ukraine, the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church, Jehovah's Witnesses, and some Ukrainian Evangelical churches.

"The annexation of Crimea led to numerous violations of religious freedom. The forcibly imposed Russian legislation is widely used to persecute religious communities and individual believers. Russia's so-called anti-extremist legislation contravenes international standards and is used for groundless accusations and persecutions of believers and religious communities," the Resolution states.

At the same time, the situation in the occupied territories of the Donbas is even worse: most of the religious communities simply ceased to exist, and freedom of thought, conscience and religion is not present as a phenomenon.

Somewhere, like during the period of the Soviet regime, believers of certain denominations are forced to gather underground, to have the opportunity for joint prayers to study the religious doctrines and to fulfil religious ceremonies.

Dozens of church buildings, prayer houses and places of worship have been captured and are now under the control of illegal armed units of the so-called "DPR" and "LPR", supported by Russia.

Practices of abduction, torture and extrajudicial executions of clerics and individual believers of most confessions, except the Orthodox Church of the Moscow Patriarchate, are widespread.

"As a result of the deliberate policy of terror by the occupation authorities, which copies the judicial arbitrariness and repressive laws of Russia, most clergy together with their families left the occupied Donbas," said human rights defenders and religious figures of Ukraine.

Religious Freedom Roundtable in Ukraine demands from the Russian Federation to take measures for the de-occupation of the Ukrainian territories of Crimea and Donbas and the cessation of their offensive on the freedom of religion, as well as the immediate release of all Ukrainian citizens imprisoned on grounds of professing their religious beliefs, which is a direct violation of the Article 9 of the European Convention on Human Rights.

In addition, the resolution calls on the UN member states to initiate a public report on the situation of freedom of thought, conscience and religion in the occupied Ukrainian territories of Crimea and Donbas in order to present it at specially organized hearings in the UN, the Council of Europe, the OSCE, the EU and the United States. The initiators of the Resolution also request the appointment of an EU Special Representative for the Occupied Ukrainian Territories of Crimea and the Donbas to carry out continuous monitoring concerning of the situation concerning the violation of human rights and to report it publicly and periodically to the EU Council.

The Resolution¹ was supported by 50 participants of the Religious Freedom Roundtable in Ukraine, among which 25 churches and religious organizations and 25 human rights and other NGOs.

This Resolution was officially announced on May 14, 2019 in Kyiv at the press center of the Ukrainian Crisis Media Centre with the involvement of the management of the Institute for Religious Freedom, the Center for Civil Liberties and other human rights activists. The event was covered by almost 40 representatives of media and was also live broadcasted in Ukrainian and English via the YouTube platform.

Participants:

Pastor Anatoliy Kozachok, First Deputy Senior Bishop of the Ukrainian Pentecostal Church;

Fr. **Oleksa Petriv**, Head of the Department of Foreign Relations in Ukraine, Mitrophorist Archpriest of the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church;

Gennadii Bilorytskyi, representative of the Union of Jewish Religious Organizations of Ukraine, legal advisor to the Chief Rabbi of Kyiv and Ukraine;

Sheikh Rustam Gafuri, Deputy Mufti of the Religious Administration of Muslims of Ukraine;

Oleksandr Zaiets, Head of the Board of the Institute for Religious Freedom, Moderator of the Religious Freedom Roundtable in Ukraine;

Olexandra Matviychuk, Head of the Board of the Center for Civil Liberties;

Evgen Zaharov, Director of the Kharkiv Human Rights Protection Group;

Olga Skripnik, Coordinator of the Crimean Human Rights Group.

¹ The full text of the Resolution is available at the following links:

In English:

[ReligiousFreedom.in.ua/files/2019.04.16-Roundtable-Resolution-signed-ENG.pdf](https://religiousfreedom.in.ua/files/2019.04.16-Roundtable-Resolution-signed-ENG.pdf)

In Ukrainian:

[ReligiousFreedom.in.ua/files/2019.04.16-Roundtable-Resolution-signed-UKR.pdf](https://religiousfreedom.in.ua/files/2019.04.16-Roundtable-Resolution-signed-UKR.pdf)

In Russian:

[ReligiousFreedom.in.ua/files/2019.04.16-Roundtable-Resolution-signed-RUS.pdf](https://religiousfreedom.in.ua/files/2019.04.16-Roundtable-Resolution-signed-RUS.pdf)

Press conference video:

[In Ukrainian](#)

[In English](#)

Media monitoring of the event description:

<https://www.5.ua/suspilstvo/kruhlyi-stil-shchodo-relihiinoi-svobody-obhovoryly-peresliduvannia-virian-riznykh-konfesii-ta-vidnovlennia-svobody-virospovidannia-v-ordlo-192219.html>

<https://theworldnews.net/ua-news/kruglii-stil-shchodo-religiinoyi-svobody-obgovorili-peresliduvannia-virian-riznykh-konfesii-ta-vidnovlennia-svobody-virospovidannia-v-ordlo-video>

https://risu.org.ua/ua/index/all_news/community/freedom_of_conscience/75786

<https://www.ukrinform.ua/rubric-crimea/2699664-majze-vsi-religijni-gromadi-v-krimu-zaznaut-utiskiv-i-peresliduvan.html>

<https://www.religion.in.ua/news/vazhlyvo/43411-religijna-spilnota-ukrayini-za-vinyatkom-upc-mp-vimagaye-vid-rosiyi-zaxodiv-dlya-deokupaciyi-krimu-i-donbasu-ta-pripinennya-tam-nastupu-na-svobodu-religiyi.html>

https://censor.net.ua/news/3126773/rf_neset_otvetstvennost_za_pritesneniya_religioznoyi_svobody_na_okkupirovanykh_territoriyah_kryma_i

<https://rubryka.com/2019/05/14/z-yavylas-rezolyutsiya-shhodo-svobody-religiyi-v-okupovanomu-krymu-ta-na-donbasi/>

https://humanrights.org.ua/material/situacijia_zi_svobodoju_virospovidannja_na_okupovanomu_donbasi_girsha_nizh_u_krimu_pravozahisniki

<https://uazmi.net/news/post/g2bc40jUiEW3fXqjuns3wU>

<http://uacrisis.org.ua/71890-freedom-of-religion-in-occupied-crimea-and-donbas>

https://www.irs.in.ua/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=1976:1&catid=34:ua&Itemid=61&lang=uk

<https://rubryka.com/2019/05/14/z-yavylas-rezolyutsiya-shhodo-svobody-religiyi-v-okupovanomu-krymu-ta-na-donbasi/>

During May-June 2019, the Secretariat of the Roundtable, composed of the representatives of the Institute for Religious Freedom and the Center for Civil Liberties, sent the Resolution to the embassies of foreign countries-members of PACE, OSCE, and also G-7 countries: both via e-mail and regular post for chosen addressees.

For the purpose of promoting the activities of the Religious Freedom Roundtable in Ukraine, on July 11, 2019, the Institute for Religious Freedom launched a web-site ReligiousFreedom.in.ua, which is available in Ukrainian, English and Russian. The Roundtable web-site contains information about the objective, activity principles and current list of the Roundtable participants, informs about the events that were held and are planned to be held, and also acquaints the general public with the documents adopted by the participants of the Roundtable.

On July 25, 2019, the second expanded meeting of the Religious Freedom Roundtable in Ukraine was held in Kyiv; it was devoted to the topic "Joint Efforts of the Civil Society to Release Citizens of Ukraine Unlawfully Deprived of Liberty in Russia, the Occupied Crimea and Donbas." More than 80 participants joint the second event: representatives of non-governmental organizations involved in the issues of release and protection of rights of the Ukrainian prisoners of war and other prisoners of the Kremlin, as well as subject-matter experts of the Ministry of the Temporarily Occupied Territories of Ukraine, National Police of Ukraine, Ukrainian Parliament Commissioner for Human Rights, Security Service of Ukraine, Ministry of Culture of Ukraine participated in the event. The participants discussed the further cooperation and practical steps were developed.

As the result of the second Roundtable, the Resolution² on Ukrainian citizens illegally detained in Russia and in the occupied Crimea and Donbas was adopted, which provides for a number of practical recommendations for Ukrainian state's leadership as well, as the international society, such as:

To demand from Russian Federation to stop political prosecution and to immediately release all the Ukrainian citizens, imprisoned out of political motivation in Russia and occupied Crimea, prisoners of war and civil hostages in the occupied Donbas and 24 imprisoned Ukrainian sailors. Until that time to demand to ensure their rights and freedoms, such as freedom from tortures, right to an effective remedy, right to a fair trial and other human rights.

Same demands were put forward by the participants of the Round Table as to the protection of rights of those people, who were imprisoned by court decisions before the occupation and who still remain in the occupied territories and we demand to transfer them to Ukraine immediately.

To appoint a Special Representative of European Union on the occupied territories of Crimea and Donbas. The powers and obligations of the Special Representative should include permanent control of the situation of human rights violation in the occupied territories of Crimea and Donbas and regular public reporting to the Council of the European Union and European Parliament.

The Resolution as well calls upon the international community to set a demand to the Russian Federation to provide unhindered access to the occupied territories of Crimea and Donbas and people detained there for the international intergovernmental organizations, such as UN Human Rights Monitoring Mission, OSCE Mission on Observance of Human Rights in Crimea, Commissioner for Human Rights, other conventional and institutional mechanisms of the Council of Europe, etc., and for the international humanitarian organizations, such as the International Committee for the Red Cross.

Media monitoring:

https://www.irs.in.ua/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=1984%3A1&catid=34%3Aua&Itemid=61&lang=ru

https://risu.org.ua/ru/index/all_news/state/national_religious_question/76635/

<https://risu.org.ua/ua/index/exclusive/reportage/76654/>

<http://ccl.org.ua/news/ob-iednannia-zusyl-hromadians-koho-suspil-stva-dlia-zvil-nennia-hromadian-ukrainy-nezakonno-pozbavlenykh-voli-v-rosii-okupovanykh-krymu-ta-donbasi/>

<https://umma.in.ua/ru/node/2317>

<https://religiousfreedom.in.ua/ua/events/2019.07.25-Roundtable-Kyiv>

In the period between the public meetings of the Religious Freedom Roundtable in Ukraine, three working sessions of the Secretariat were held involving some participants of the Roundtable in order to analyze the effectiveness of the events undertaken and plan further work.

² The full text of the second Resolution is available at the following links:

Ukrainian: <https://religiousfreedom.in.ua/ua/documents/roundtable-resolution-on-illegally-detained-citizens-of-Ukraine-in-Russia-occupied-Crimea-Donbas>

Russian: <https://religiousfreedom.in.ua/ru/documents/roundtable-resolution-on-illegally-detained-citizens-of-Ukraine-in-Russia-occupied-Crimea-Donbas>

English: <https://religiousfreedom.in.ua/en/documents/roundtable-resolution-on-illegally-detained-citizens-of-Ukraine-in-Russia-occupied-Crimea-Donbas>

One of those working groups prepared side-event on OSCE HDIM 2019 and speeches for the side-event on the panel meeting. Called by the Center for Civil Liberties the side-event “Religious freedom in the Ukrainian territories of Crimea and Donbas occupied by Russian Federation³” took place on September 19, 2019 on the margins of the HDIM⁴ in Warsaw, Poland. The side-event was attended by diplomats from OSCE member States, religious leaders and social activists.

Information about hardships faced by Ukrainian believers of various denominations in Crimea, Donetsk and Luhansk Oblasts (Donbas) following the Russian occupation and discussion on lack of proper international monitoring in the Crimea and inaccessibility for human rights organizations, especially in the occupied territories of the Donetsk and Luhansk was presented by *Archbishop Eustratius* (born Zoria), Deputy Head of the Department for External Church Relations, the Orthodox Church of Ukraine; *Liliia Hemendzhy*, lawyer for the Crimean Tatars and Crimean political prisoners; *Vitaly Ponomarev*, Program Manager of Memorial Russian Human Rights Centre, and *Oleksandra Romantsova*, Executive Director of the Centre for Civil Liberties. Event attendees urged the diplomats and OSCE structures, including ODIHR and SMM, to set up a comprehensive and impartial international monitoring of the status of freedom of religion or opinion, documenting and making public violations and crimes committed on the grounds of religion across the territories beyond the Ukrainian Government’s control in the Donetsk and Luhansk Oblasts, as well as in the occupied Crimea.

Media monitoring:

https://www.irs.in.ua/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=1988%3A1&catid=34%3Aua&Itemid=61&lang=uk

https://risu.org.ua/ua/index/all_news/community/freedom_of_conscience/77200

<https://www.radiosvoboda.org/a/news-warsawa-obce/30171080.html>

<https://www.ukrinform.ua/rubric-crimea/2783869-krimski-pravozahisniki-na-okupovanomu-pivostrovi-pocastisali-peresliduvanna-viran.html>

Preposition for further development

Institute for Religious Freedom, the moderator of the Roundtable, provides constant communication and holds regular consultative meetings with religious leaders of various faiths, targeted at coordination of positions of various faiths and mediation to resolve differences related to the activities of the Roundtable. Important to mention that completion of the project "Support of the Dialogue on Religious Freedom in Ukraine" co-funded by the UCSJ will not lead to the termination of activities of the Religious Freedom Roundtable in Ukraine since the formed Secretariat and majority of the participants were interested in the continuation of this initiative considering its uniqueness and effectiveness to solve difficult socially important issues.

³ Ref. Schedule and overview of side-events <https://www.osce.org/odihr/430004?download=true> (page 15)

⁴ English: <https://www.facebook.com/osce.odihr/videos/390868265156251/>

Russian: <https://www.facebook.com/osce.odihr/videos/764789633978515/>