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**STATEMENT BY
MR. ALEKSANDR VOLGAREV, DEPUTY PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF
THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION, AT THE 1448th MEETING OF THE
OSCE PERMANENT COUNCIL**

2 November 2023

On the ongoing gross violations by the Kyiv regime of the rights of believers

Mr. Chairperson,

We have repeatedly drawn attention to the unpunished evil, atrocities and inhumane acts of the Kyiv regime in the sphere of religious rights and freedoms. Unfortunately, discrimination on religious grounds, threats and physical attacks by nationalists, initiation of criminal proceedings under far-fetched pretexts, and much more have become a sad daily occurrence for parishioners and clergy of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church.

Recently, however, the puppet authorities of that country, indulged by their handlers, have gone even further. On 19 October this year, the Verkhovna Rada (Ukrainian Parliament) adopted on the first reading the draft law on amending Article 16 of the Ukrainian Freedom of Conscience and Religious Organizations Act. This is an altogether opportunistic political document that takes into account neither the international obligations of that State, nor its Constitution, much less the feelings of believers.

The proposed law, in particular, provides for a significant increase in the list of grounds for terminating the work of religious organizations. Its authors were clearly acting on political orders to justify the freedom given to the representatives of the Zelenskyy regime to pursue their pernicious activities aimed at destroying canonical Orthodoxy and the Ukrainian Orthodox Church. Needless to say, the claims that the draft law is supposed to ensure spiritual independence and prevent splits in society along religious lines do not stand up to criticism. There is no doubt in anyone's mind that it is aimed at inciting hostility and intolerance on religious grounds and dividing citizens along religious lines.

The legalization of the persecution of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church will usher in a new stage in the brutal repression of its adherents and a further intensification of the persecution of its priests. Openly and without regard for supposed European standards in the field of human rights protection, it speaks of the risk that ministers of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church could "exert an influence" on citizens, which could lead to the "creation of social tension in certain cells in society and incite Ukrainian citizens to commit unlawful acts". Moreover, the explanatory note to the document directly mentions 65 criminal proceedings against clergymen of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church, which is called "a structural subdivision of the Russian Orthodox Church". And this is despite the fact that the Ukrainian Orthodox Church has had an autonomous

status for decades and that the headquarters of the Metropolitanate is in Kyiv. By the way, as publicly acknowledged by the leadership of the Security Service of Ukraine, at least 26 representatives of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church have already been criminally charged and a further 19 clergymen have been sentenced.

The draft law has yet to go through the discussion and finalization stages. However, there is no point in harbouring illusions and counting on a possible change in its entirely discriminatory nature. The Kyiv regime, supported by its Western handlers, who, incidentally, have granted Ukraine the status of a European Union candidate country, continues to discriminate against its citizens on a large scale, including in the religious sphere. Through their actions, its representatives violate the country's international obligations, including its OSCE commitments. In particular, these include the relevant provisions of the 1975 Helsinki Final Act, the 1983 CSCE Madrid Document and the 1990 CSCE Copenhagen Document. In them, the participating States unequivocally reaffirmed their commitment to religious freedoms and to ensuring the rights of believers.

What is happening in Ukraine should finally become the object of attention and receive a public response by the OSCE's relevant executive structures and the personal representatives of the Chairperson-in-Office. A real tragedy is unfolding before our eyes, in which ignoring what is happening and the virtual inaction of officials of our Organization, who have a mandate to intervene in the situation, becomes tantamount to complicity in these crimes. We invite all lovers of the beautiful but in reality empty words heard here in the Permanent Council to reflect on their personal responsibility before the inevitable judgement of history.

Thank you for your attention.