

THE IMPACT OF THE RUSSIAN INVASION ON FAITH-BASED COMMUNITIES IN UKRAINE

Infographics based on the IRF's research

RELIGIOUS BUILDINGS AND SACRED PLACES

damaged by shelling because of Russian full-scale invasion of Ukraine

* As of July 15, 2022

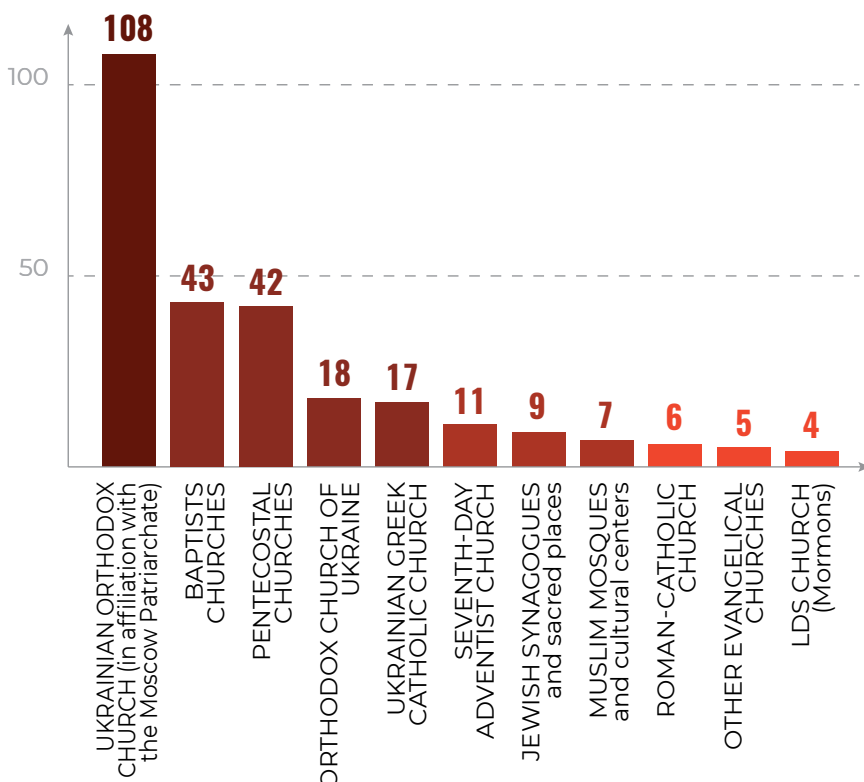


At least **270** religious buildings and sacred places have already been damaged due to the Russian invasion of Ukraine.

CONFESSIONAL AFFILIATION

of the religious buildings and sacred places damaged by shelling because of Russian full-scale invasion of Ukraine

* As of July 15, 2022



READ THE FULL TEXT OF THE IRF's RESEARCH

LOCKED FAITH.org



IRF's research is supported by the Netherlands embassy in Kyiv



Kingdom of the Netherlands

VIDEO TESTIMONIES OF RUSSIAN WAR CRIMES IN UKRAINE



Denis Gorenkov:

"After Russian troops entered the Kyiv region, their headquarter was located in the building of our religious mission in Irpin. As result, our building was totally destroyed."

<https://youtu.be/CCgbwldDqck>



Fr. Sergiy Chudinovich:

"Russian military threatened me in every possible way. They put me on my knees, put my head on a chair, pressed me down with a knee, and said that they would rape me with the baton."

<https://youtu.be/T5vaeQD43hw>



Pastor Valentyn Zahreba:

"For many believers today, the issue of survival is becoming extremely important. Now both of our church buildings in Mariupol are destroyed."

https://youtu.be/cK_zpo7wBoA



Oleg Bondarenko:

"Russian soldiers threw me into a sewage well, where I spent two days. Every day they mauled someone from the local population to death: they shot their legs and broke their hands."

<https://youtu.be/lzxRAO6rCuE>



Fr. Andrii Klyushev

"Russians wanted to get into our church. They broke down the doors to our bell tower, climbed it, then a Russian sniper climbed the fire escape to the roof of our church and use it as a firepoint."

<https://youtu.be/gEp3oZtGGyM>



Rabbi Moshe Azman:

"No one asked Russians to come in Ukraine to "denazify" someone, but they came and shot peaceful citizens of Russian-speaking cities of Kharkiv, Mariupol, and Kyiv region."

<https://youtu.be/F5-Tsr20YkA>



Mufti Said Ismagilov:

"Russia destroyed four Muslim religious buildings in Donbas. This happened as a result of heavy missile and artillery attacks by the Russian troops."

<https://youtu.be/txA-UAJH-I8>



Imam Rustem Asanov:

«Russians hate us. They have only one goal – the destruction of the Ukrainian nation as a whole. If they hear the Ukrainian language or see the Ukrainian flag, it tears them apart from the inside.»

<https://youtu.be/SPBeKYh9dM4>



Fr. Ruslan Mykhalkiv:

"Russian soldiers shelled and robbed the Catholic seminary in the Kyiv region. They damaged many windows broke down doors, and burglarized the seminary."

<https://youtu.be/RpDJ59MW4Fo>



Pastor Vyacheslav Keba:

"When Russian soldiers came to our adaptation center, they started with shelling, then began to break everything, and finally stole many things."

<https://youtu.be/BhkNtHXoXvM>

RUSSIAN ATTACKS

ON RELIGIOUS FREEDOM IN UKRAINE

Summary of the IRF's research

AUTHORS AND METHODOLOGY

The Institute for Religious Freedom (IRF) is a human rights NGO, founded in 2001 in Kyiv, Ukraine. Our goal is to protect and promote religious freedom and other related human rights, facilitate inter-faith dialogue and church-state cooperation, strengthen democratic foundations and civil society in Ukraine.

From the first days of the full-scale Russian invasion, the Institute for Religious Freedom started its research on the impact of the war on faith-based communities in Ukraine. IRF specialists conducted monitoring and open-source data collection, documented attacks on religious leaders and buildings, and recorded eyewitness testimonies of these events in various regions of Ukraine. This report covers the recent period of Russian aggression against Ukraine from February 24th to July 15th, 2022 and contains an analysis of the state of freedom of religion on the Crimean peninsula, occupied by Russia in 2014.

For the purpose of this research, IRF additionally conducted a written and oral survey of leaders or official representatives of a vast majority of churches, other religious associations, and heads of religious educational institutions of Ukraine. In conclusion, this research expresses the impact of the aggressive war that the Russian Federation started against Ukraine on at least 20 different denominations, which unite around 31 thousand religious communities, constituting 84% of the whole religious network of Ukraine. Among them are Orthodox, Catholic, and Protestant churches, Jewish and Muslim religious associations, as well as various religious and ethnic minorities.

BACKGROUND

In 2014 – 2015, the Russian aggression against Ukraine was accompanied by abductions, tortures, and extrajudicial executions of clergymen and believers of the Orthodox Church of Ukraine, the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church, and a number of Evangelical Protestant churches (Baptists, Pentecostals, Adventists, etc.). The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons) and Jehovah's Witnesses were subjected to targeted harassment.

As a result, in the Russian-occupied territories of Donetsk and Luhansk regions most religious communities ceased to exist, believers were forced to pray privately or gather clandestinely, and religious freedom disappeared. The forced implementation of Russian legislation on combating "extremism" and "illegal missionary activity" has significantly worsened the situation of religious communities and associations in these regions as well as in occupied Crimea.

KEY FINDINGS

From February 24, 2022, Russian attacks on religious freedom in Ukraine have become crueler. If previously priests on the occupied territories only received death threats, now religious leaders are tortured and killed – again, but on a scale far worse than in 2014. If previously Russian occupational authorities expelled Ukrainian believers from their churches and prayer houses, now Russia is destroying the spiritual heritage of Ukraine with missile attacks, shelling, and looting of religious buildings without justification by military necessity.

Russia's imperialistic policy, based on the ideology of the "Russkiy mir" (Russian world), is being openly implemented in the Ukrainian territories under occupation. For example, by removing Ukrainian books from libraries and burning them in public, banning the use of Ukrainian language in the public sphere and even on road signs. In addition, the occupational authorities strive to take under control all religious activity, forcing local religious communities to justify Russian aggression and establish subordination with the Russian religious centers, and compelling pro-Ukrainian religious leaders to cooperation using threats and torture.

Russian media and religious leaders, such as Patriarch Kirill of Moscow and All Russia, are justifying the war against Ukraine with propaganda about the supposed protection of Orthodox believers of the Moscow Patriarchate and Russian speakers. Instead, Russian military aircraft and artillery are destroying both houses of worship and believers, regardless of language, denomination, and ethnicity. Examples of massive destructions such as in Bucha, Irpin, Mariupol, and Kharkiv allow to conclude that Russia would rather eliminate whole cities and destroy the Ukrainian historical and spiritual heritage than accept the right of the Ukrainian people to self-determination and sovereignty. Numerous documented crimes committed by Russian soldiers in Ukraine have to be investigated according to international humanitarian law as war crimes, genocide, and crimes against humanity.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings presented in this report and to maximally protect Ukrainian religious communities from further harm, we urge:

- 1. The US Senate and President** – to pass, sign, and implement the H.R. 5408 Ukraine Religious Freedom Support Act.
- 2. The EU and other democratic states** – to introduce personal sanctions against Russian officials, religious leaders, media workers, and other individuals who are responsible for justifying and (or) implementing repressions against Ukrainian religious leaders and faith-based communities.
- 3.** To create a Special Tribunal for the Punishment of the Crime of Aggression against Ukraine.
- 4.** To facilitate the investigation by the International Criminal Court of any war crimes, crimes against humanity and genocide that are perpetrated on the territory of Ukraine
- 5. The EU, US, United Kingdom, Japan, and other UN members** – to support the efforts of Ukraine in investigating and prosecuting war crimes, crimes of genocide, and crimes against humanity committed during the Russian war against Ukraine. In particular through the creation of international mechanisms and instruments in addition to national administration of justice, for example, in the format of an international hybrid tribunal for war crimes and other international crimes.
- 6. The UN and OSCE** – to demand Russia to provide unhindered access to the occupied Ukrainian territories, including Crimea, and the people detained there for independent monitoring missions to observe the situation regarding religious freedom and other human rights.
- 7. Ukrainian authorities** – with the goal of criminal prosecution of persons guilty of committing war crimes, crimes of genocide, and crimes against humanity, it is appropriate **for the Parliament of Ukraine** to ratify the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court and **for the President of Ukraine** – to sign the Law on the Implementation of the Norms of International Criminal and Humanitarian Law, adopted by the Parliament of Ukraine on May 20, 2021 (draft law # 2689).