

**Input for the follow-up report of the UN High Commissioner on Human Rights  
On combatting intolerance based on religion or belief  
(UN HRC Resolution 58/29, para 7-8)**

**Religion and belief in the situation of war:  
Comments on the situation in the Russian Federation  
in relation to the Russia's aggression against Ukraine**

**September 30, 2025**

**Summary**

The authors of this unput express concern about the militarization of the spiritual and religious sphere in modern Russia. This relates, first of all, the aggressive pro-war position of the Russian Orthodox Church, but also of representatives of other faiths; politicization of religious life; propaganda of war via religious instruments; and persecution of religious leaders expressing their anti-war views. All this leads to discrediting of religious ideas of peace and non-violence, perversion of religious concepts, loss of independence by faiths and loss of freedom of religion by believers, and ultimately to increasing hatred and hostility in society, which contradicts the intentions of most religions.

**Militarization of the spiritual and religious sphere and the imposition of aggression on believers**

Over the past decades, the Russian Orthodox Church has become a de facto state institution, supported and promoted at all levels of authorities in Russia, and above all by president Putin. Since the very beginning of the military conflict unleashed by Russia against Ukraine (2014), the Russian Orthodox Church (ROC) has not officially opposed it. Over time and especially after the outbreak of a full-scale war against Ukraine (February 2022) the ROC has taken an aggressive pro-military position. Patriarch Kirill is one of the main promoters of the war; through his public speeches and official instructions emanating from the governing bodies of the Russian Orthodox Church, the militaristic propaganda is widely disseminated.

**Examples:**

Since September 2022, Orthodox priests have been obliged to pray for the "victory" of Russia, which is called "Holy Rus'". It is important to stress that the Moscow priest Johann Koval was defrocked for replacing the word "victory" with the word "peace" in this prayer (May 2023).

The ecclesiastic court in the case of a priest who opposed the war declared pacifism a heretical doctrine in preliminary court documents (June 2023).

A program document "The Present and Future of the Russian World" adopted by the Russian National Gathering (Russkiy Narodny Sobor, a non-governmental organization headed by Patriarch Kirill) states that "from a spiritual and moral point of view, a special military operation (i.e. the war against Ukraine – ADC Memorial) is a Holy War in which Russia and its people, defending the united spiritual space of Holy Russia, carry out the mission of "Holding", protecting the world from the onslaught of globalism and the victory of the West, which has fallen into Satanism". It also states that "the entire territory of modern Ukraine should enter the zone of exclusive influence of Russia" (November 2023).

Orthodox priests consecrate military equipment (tanks, artillery); one of them allowed the consecration of nuclear weapons (Archpriest Konstantin Tatarintsev, Deputy Chairman of the Synodal Department of the Russian Orthodox Church for Cooperation with the Armed Forces and Law Enforcement Agencies, August 2024).

At the conference entitled "*Holy War: The Transformation of Russia*", the Chair of the Synodal Department for Interaction with the Armed Forces and Law Enforcement Agencies, Metropolitan Kirill of Stavropol and Nevinnomyssk, stated that as at January 2024, 707 priests of the Russian Orthodox Church had undertaken more than 2,000 trips to the combat zone.

In addition to the self-discrediting of the Russian Orthodox Church as a religious institution — which has resulted in the loss of its standing in many countries (including condemnation by other Orthodox churches and denominations, restrictions on the activities of the Russian Orthodox Church owing to concerns about Russian influence, the transfer of Orthodox parishes of the ROC to other jurisdictions, and the loss of church buildings) — the dissemination of militaristic ideology through church channels has provoked schisms among believers. Thus, instead of preaching peace, humanism and compassion, the ROC has been disseminating the aggressive ideology of the so-called “Russian world”.

The divisions and contradictions resulting from the spread of militarism through religious channels have also been observed among adherents of other faiths. As in the case of the ROC, the war of the Russian Federation against Ukraine has been supported by official representatives of other religions recognized in the Russian Federation as “traditional”.

Representatives of the Spiritual Administration of Muslims of the Russian Federation and its regional offices have publicly expressed support for the war; as in the case of Orthodox priests, Muslim imams have also been present in the combat zone. According to the press service of the Spiritual Administration of Muslims of the Russian Federation, “imams systematically hold talks with personnel before they go on combat duty, explaining, inter alia from a religious perspective, the need to defend the Motherland, the brotherly people of Donbas, and the necessity of conducting the special military operation there”. The Spiritual Administration of Muslims is active in the territories of Ukraine under occupation. Immediately after the full-scale invasion of Ukraine by the armed forces of the Russian Federation (2022), the Mufti and Chair of the Spiritual Administration of Muslims of Chechnya, Salah Mezhiev, recorded an address in which he justified the participation of Muslims in the war. The Chair of the Spiritual Centre of Muslims of Ingushetia, Ahmed Sagov, likewise declared his support for the policy of the Russian Federation towards Ukraine. At the same time, in the North Caucasus region, representatives of the religious opposition have opposed the participation of Muslims in the war, while a significant number of Muslims from the North Caucasus have been fighting on the side of Ukraine, regarding the regime of President Putin as an enemy of Islam.

The Head of the Buddhist Traditional Sangha of the Russian Federation, Damba Ayusheev (Buryatia), described participation in hostilities in Ukraine as “a sacred duty for Buddhists” (interview with *Izvestia*, 30 September 2022). The invasion of Ukraine was also supported by the Head of the Buddhist Union of Kalmykia, Khar-Tseren Bembaev. In February 2023, Buddhist lamas in Tyva held a prayer service by videoconference for soldiers on the front line. Lamas from other regions of the Russian Federation have also publicly supported the invasion of Ukraine from a religious perspective and have conducted rituals for members of the armed forces. A mobilized Buddhist from Buryatia stated in an interview that lamas arriving in the combat zone told soldiers that participation in the war did not contradict Buddhism, provided that they confronted the enemy without malice or aggression and with compassion.

The institutionalization of religious practices aimed at supporting the aggression of the Russian Federation has also taken place within religions not recognized as “traditional”. In particular, during mobilization in various regions (including Tyva, Buryatia, Irkutsk oblast and Kemerovo oblast) and directly in the combat zone, shamans have performed rituals with the support of government officials. For example, in 2022, shamans from Irkutsk oblast performed a protective ritual in Kemerovo oblast for mobilized persons; the event was approved by the Governor of Irkutsk oblast, and the shamans were accompanied on their trip by the Head of the Ekhirit-Bulagatsky district. In 2025, a Deputy of the Legislative Assembly of Irkutsk oblast organized a trip for shamans from Buryatia and Irkutsk oblast to the territories of Donetsk oblast under occupation.

### **Persecution of religious leaders for their anti-war position**

As of May 2024, 59 priests of the Russian Orthodox Church who served in Russia or abroad were subjected to repression for their anti-war position (data from *Novaya Gazeta - Europa*). They were punished within the internal church hierarchy and structures (defrocking, prohibition to serve, forced retirement) and/or were subject to administrative and criminal prosecution for “discrediting” the army. At least 13 clerics of the Russian Orthodox Church who signed a public letter against Russian aggression were persecuted, while in total the letter was signed by more than 300 clergy.

The former Supreme Lama of Kalmykia, the official representative of the Dalai Lama, Telo Tulku Rinpoche (Erdni Ombadikov), who openly opposed the war, was recognized as a "foreign agent" in 2023 and was forced to leave Russia. Baldan Bazarov, the former rector of the Kyren datsan from the Tunka district of Buryatia, was also forced to emigrate because of his anti-war position.

Immediately after the outbreak of the large-scale war, the chief rabbi of Moscow, Pinchas Goldschmidt, resigned and left Russia due to pressure from the authorities demanding public approval of the war against Ukraine.

Since 2019, shaman Alexander Gabyshev has been criminally prosecuted for marching from Yakutsk to Moscow for the purpose of peaceful protest. Gabyshev has been forcibly detained in a psychiatric clinic for several years.

### **Recommendations**

The Russian authorities, both clerical and secular, must stop repressing independent religious leaders;

Intra-religious discourse should be completely free from propaganda of war and violence;

International religious organizations should cease cooperation with religious leaders/organizations involved in war crimes and propaganda of militarism.