

Translated from the Russian

No. 04/698

2nd June 2023

Right Reverend Peter SKOV-JAKOBSEN
Bishop of Copenhagen

Prof Peter LODBERG
Chairman of the Council on International Relations
Evangelical Lutheran Church in Denmark

Rt Revd Bishop Peter Skov-Jakobsen,
Dear Prof Peter Lodberg,

On behalf of His Holiness Patriarch Kirill of Moscow and All Russia I thank you for your Easter greetings, to which I respond: Indeed, Christ is Risen!

His Holiness has read your letter concerning the situation in Ukraine that apparently was written as a follow-up to the meeting of the Council on International Relations of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Denmark. To our astonishment and regret, the Council's assessment of the current situation is completely in line with the political narratives promoted by politicians and mass media in the West. In this context, your reproach to the Russian Orthodox Church about its alleged political bias seems particularly strange as for our Church the developments in Ukraine are a cause of great pain and sorrow.

What is also aggrieving is your letter's unbrotherly tone which is out of line with the rules befitting correspondence between Christian leaders. Even in the midst of the cold war Christian churches did not resort to such rhetoric but for all provocations strived to maintain dialogue.

The situation around Ukraine is undoubtedly tragic. For Rus', Kyiv is the cradle of Orthodox faith, and the majority of the Ukrainian people are members of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church that for a thousand years has been linked with us by spiritual bonds.

Since the onset of the internecine strife in Ukraine, that is since 2014, His Holiness Patriarch Kirill of Moscow and All Russia has been calling for its peaceful resolution and has personally done much to ensure it. For almost ten years now the Moscow

Patriarchate has been using various means, including different forums of the World Council of Churches, to seek the conflict resolution, raising public awareness of the suffering of people in Ukraine and Donbas.

Moreover, the Russian Orthodox Church exerts much effort to counteract attempts to split the Ukrainian society on religious grounds, which are being made to this day by representatives of the Patriarchate of Constantinople enjoying support of the Ukrainian authorities. As is evident even now, these attempts only bring new sorrows to millions of Ukrainians, fuelling escalation of the crisis. Over the recent years, delegates of many Christian churches and organisations, including the WCC, have visited the Moscow Patriarchate and they can confirm that our Church does everything within its power to bring about peace as soon as possible.

In such times of hardships Christian solidarity takes on an added importance. In a world full of “aggression and selfishness,” as you were right to note, it is Christians who are called to show mutual love and oppose any manipulative political influence.

The Russian Orthodox Church is open to working together with fraternal Christian churches on various platforms, including the World Council of Churches, which is to remain a platform of inter-church cooperation, available to everyone, as was once again confirmed at the meeting between His Holiness Patriarch Kirill and Dr Jerry Pillay, WCC general secretary, on 17th May 2023.

The primary task for the Church is to pray for the soonest cessation of the conflict, and rendering aid to those affected by the hostilities should be a matter of its special concern.

Regrettably, you did not deem it necessary to draw attention in your letter to the fact that certain countries derive financial benefit from the situation in Ukraine, supplying weapons and ammunition to the combat zone. Those who are thus complicit in the escalation of the conflict are also fully responsible for the sufferings of the peoples of Russia and Ukraine.

Besides, it is especially important for Christian churches today to raise awareness of the persecutions against the Ukrainian Orthodox Church. Since the very onset of the conflict it has been helping those affected by the hostilities but has itself fallen victim to oppression and violence. While the world community keeps silent, Orthodox Christians are being deprived of their churches, beaten up and imprisoned, with members of the Ukrainian schismatic groups involved in these unlawful actions. The

clergy – citizens of Ukraine – are being deprived of their citizenship and used in exchanges of prisoners of war.

Providing relief to the conflict victims is an important part of church mission. As for the Russian Orthodox Church, since February 2022 it has raised over 332 million roubles and collected 2,860 tons of humanitarian aid. Most of it has been distributed among millions of refugees seeking shelter in Russia. The WCC and ACT Alliance joint delegation that visited the Moscow Patriarchate's Dioceses of Rostov-on-Don and Shakhty in May 2022 could see the scale of our work.

If the Church of Denmark wants to show its Christian solidarity, we invite it to join the work our Church carries out in helping the conflict victims and to raise its voice in defence of Christians persecuted in Ukraine.

+Anthony
Metropolitan of Volokolamsk
Chairman
Department for External Church Relations
Moscow Patriarchate