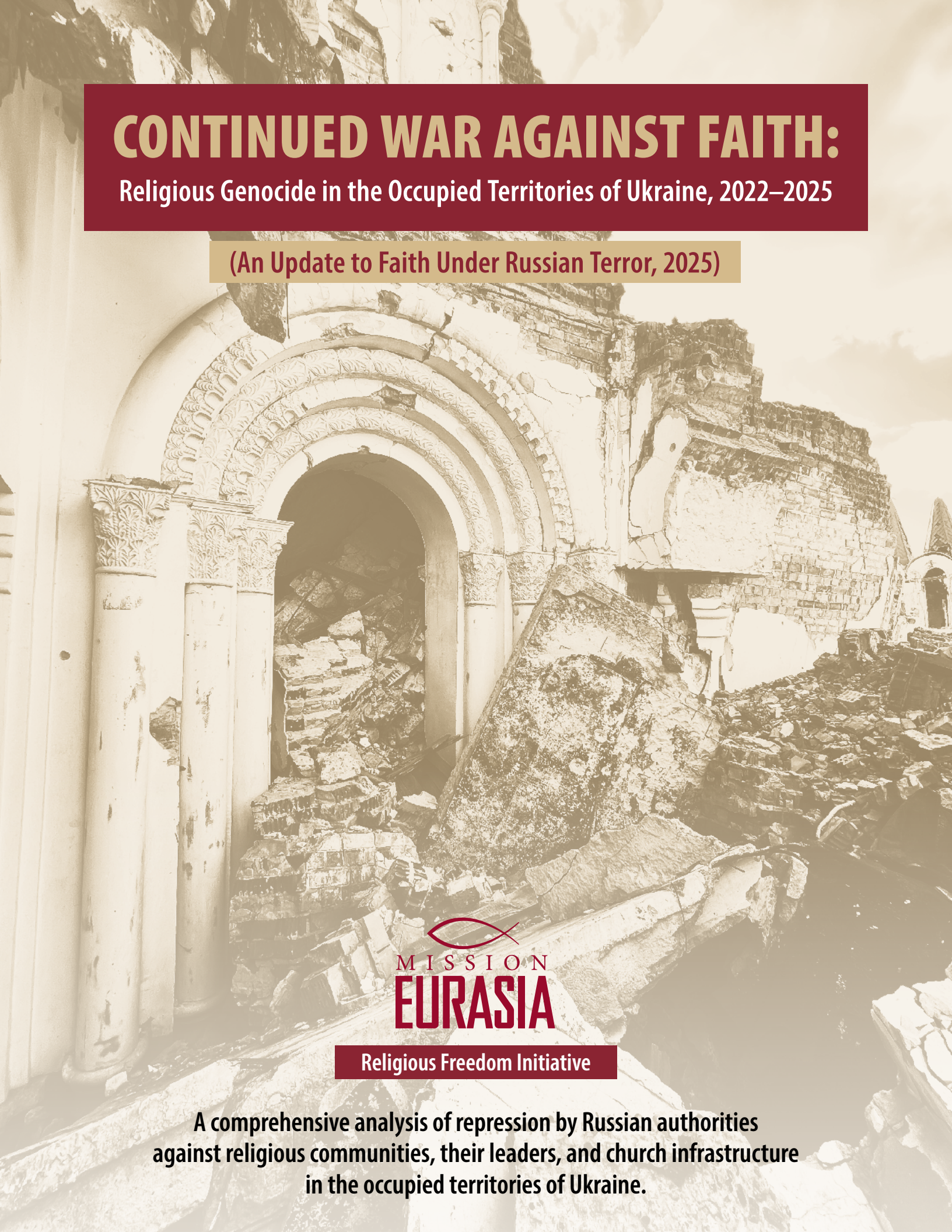

CONTINUED WAR AGAINST FAITH:

Religious Genocide in the Occupied Territories of Ukraine, 2022–2025

(An Update to Faith Under Russian Terror, 2025)

MISSION EURASIA

Religious Freedom Initiative

A comprehensive analysis of repression by Russian authorities against religious communities, their leaders, and church infrastructure in the occupied territories of Ukraine.

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The updated report **"Continued War Against Faith: Religious Genocide in the Occupied Territories of Ukraine, 2022–2025"** continues Mission Eurasia's line of research, including *Faith Under Fire* (2023), *Faith in Chains* (2024), and *Faith Under Russian Terror* (2025), expanding them with new data from 2024–2025. The report covers the entire period from the annexation of Crimea and the outbreak of the war in Donbas to the current phase of Russia's full-scale aggression, showing how the Russian Federation moved from a "laboratory of repression" in Crimea and the occupied parts of the Donetsk and Luhansk regions to implementing systematic religious genocide across a much broader part of Ukraine.

The report is based on a comprehensive range of sources, including in-depth interviews with victims, their families, and witnesses; materials from Ukrainian and international human rights organizations; consultations with attorneys and subject-matter experts; analysis of Russian legislation and judicial practice; and open official data and media sources. A distinct empirical component of the study is drawn from Mission Eurasia's *Book of Remembrance of the War* project, which documents fallen clergy, chaplains, and community leaders.

The consolidated findings present a coherent and comprehensive picture—from killings, abductions, torture, deportations, the confiscation of places of worship, and the forced "registration" of religious communities to the militarization of children and the destruction of religious identity. Based on its analysis of these crimes, the report sets out specific recommendations for the international community on legal and political responses to the policy of religious genocide being carried out against Ukraine.

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1. FOREWORD

Ukraine is now in the fourth year of the Russian Federation's full-scale invasion. The largest military conflict in Europe since the Second World War has already resulted in the deaths of hundreds of thousands of people, the forced displacement of millions within the country, and the creation of millions of refugees around the world.

For any attentive observer, it is evident that the aim of Russia's aggression against Ukraine goes far beyond the destruction of military targets and critical infrastructure. Night after night, apartment buildings, hospitals, kindergartens, schools, places of worship, and churches are subjected to attacks. Tens of thousands of civilians have been wounded, permanently disabled, or killed; among the victims are hundreds of children across Ukraine. In the occupied territories, the Russian authorities have launched systematic persecution of religious communities, placing believers, religious leaders, and clergy under constant pressure. The rhetoric of the so-called "occupation authorities," openly broadcast by Russian propagandists, makes it clear that Russia seeks to destroy freedom of religion and Ukrainian religious identity in the occupied territories.

In His teaching, Jesus Christ said, "…you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free" (John 8:32). Today more than ever, the situation of religious life in the occupied territories requires honest and comprehensive coverage. Only such clarity makes it possible to remain free from the influence of distorted reporting, biased assessments, and manipulative statements about the religious situation in Ukraine.

Throughout all the years of the war, Mission Eurasia's Religious Freedom Initiative has carried out consistent work to document violations committed by the Russian occupation authorities, to advocate for the rights of believers who remain in the occupied territories, and to support churches that have come under pressure. Mission Eurasia's previous reports—*Faith Under Fire* (2023), *Faith in Chains* (2024), and F*aith Under Russian Terror* (2025)—laid the foundation for a systematic analysis of religious persecution and have become an important part of the international discourse on war crimes committed against believers in Ukraine. The use of Mission Eurasia's reports in USCIRF documentation, official statements by Ukrainian authorities, and analyses by specialized civil society organizations attest to the reliability and relevance of the data presented in this report.

The updated report *Continued War Against Faith: Religious Genocide in the Occupied Territories of Ukraine, 2022–2025* continues a systematic program of research and monitoring of the state of religious freedom in Ukrainian territories occupied by Russia. Its purpose is not only to document violations, but also to offer tools for advocacy, legal assessment, and international response.

We remain committed to speaking the truth about the resilience of Ukrainian religious communities in the face of occupation, to supporting them in their ministry, and to calling on governments, international institutions, and the Christian community to take decisive action to address the consequences of Russian aggression, restore justice, and protect freedom of religion.

Mykhailo Brytsyn
Director, Religious Freedom Initiative
Mission Eurasia

2. MISSION EURASIA: SCOPE OF ACTIVITIES

Mission Eurasia is an educational and charitable organization registered in the United States as a nonprofit under section 501(c)(3). It was founded in 1991, immediately following the collapse of the Soviet Union, by evangelical leaders Peter and Anita Deyneka. Today, under the leadership of Sergey Rakhuba, Mission Eurasia and its affiliates operate in 15 countries. Throughout its history, the ministry has focused on providing practical support to religious organizations and society as a whole in overcoming the legacy of the communist era, responding to contemporary challenges in different countries, and advancing new opportunities in the spiritual, social, and educational spheres.

In order to monitor the state of religious freedom in the countries of the Eurasian region, coordinate the work of Mission Eurasia teams, advocate for the interests of religious communities and their leaders in various countries, and develop ministry recommendations, Mission Eurasia established the Religious Freedom Initiative in 2014.

With the start of the full-scale invasion, Mission Eurasia directed its efforts both toward addressing the humanitarian crisis and toward researching the situation in the occupied territories.

The current core areas of work of Mission Eurasia's Religious Freedom Initiative include:

- Monitoring developments in the religious sphere and conducting analytical research
- Providing assistance to church leaders serving in occupied and liberated territories
- Representing the interests of religious communities and clergy and defending their rights across various national and international platforms
- Providing spiritual and psychological rehabilitation for ministers
- Offering consultative support to religious communities in restoring their activities, governance mechanisms, and recovering lost or confiscated documentation
- Supporting domestic Ukrainian and international dialogue on religious activity and the protection of freedom of religion.

The issue of religious persecution in the occupied territories of Ukraine has been consistently addressed in three reports by Mission Eurasia:

The report *Faith Under Fire* (2023) analyzes the first year of the full-scale invasion. Based on firsthand testimonies, it documents repression, interrogations, arrests, and abuse of clergy and believers, and provides statistical data on damaged and destroyed places of worship.

The report *Faith in Chains* (2024) compares violations of religious freedom in the occupied territories of Ukraine with patterns of persecution in Belarus, highlighting shared motives and practices of authoritarian regimes and updating data on the destruction of church buildings.

The final report *Faith Under Russian Terror* (2025) consolidates findings from monitors carried out between 2022 and 2024, detailing patterns of intimidation, torture, and killings of clergy; the seizure and confiscation of church property; the role of the Russian Orthodox Church in advancing a policy of "religious genocide"; coercive re-registration of religious communities; the militarization of children; and ongoing pressure on religious leaders.

The reports and other materials produced by Mission Eurasia's Religious Freedom Initiative are available at: https://missioneurasia.org/religious-freedom/.

Mission Eurasia's *Book of Remembrance of the War* project collects and verifies testimonies about priests, pastors, and church ministers of all denominations in Ukraine who have been killed as a result of the war. This initiative includes ongoing monitoring of the situation, verification of information through direct contact with family members, fellow clergy, and local communities, careful documentation of confirmed cases and the preservation of their life stories and ministries. In parallel, the project provides support to the families of the deceased and to religious communities that have suffered these losses. Our goal is to preserve historical memory, pass on examples of faithful service to God and to others to future generations, and provide the international community with evidence of the human cost of Russia's aggression.

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

To monitor the state of religious freedom and to prepare the updated report *Continued War Against Faith: Religious Genocide in the Occupied Territories of Ukraine, 2022–2025*, more than 60 in-depth interviews were conducted in 2025. The interviews were carried out with representatives of all major Christian confessions in Ukraine, including Orthodox Christians (Orthodox Church of Ukraine), Catholics (Roman Catholic Church and Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church), and several Protestant denominations (various Baptist unions, Pentecostal churches, Evangelical Christians, charismatic churches, Mennonites, and others). Interviewees included religious leaders and clergy at different levels: heads of national and regional religious associations, bishops, priests, pastors, deacons, and church leaders responsible for specific areas of ministry.

The report is based on a comprehensive range of sources, including in-depth interviews with victims, their families, and witnesses; materials from Ukrainian and international human rights organizations; consultations with attorneys and subject-matter experts; analysis of Russian legislation and judicial practice; and open official data and media sources. A distinct empirical component of the study consists of databases from Mission Eurasia's *Book of Remembrance of the War* project, which document confirmed cases of the deaths of priests, pastors, and other religious ministers, as well as military chaplains and clergy serving in the armed forces.

Representatives of Mission Eurasia's Religious Freedom Initiative remain in constant communication with those engaged in ministry in the occupied territories of the Donetsk, Zaporizhzhia, and Kherson regions. Given that this report largely addresses the activities of religious communities and the actions of Russian authorities in occupied territories of Ukraine, safeguards were applied in presenting the material. Some sources are cited anonymously, and, in certain quotations, the names of locations, religious communities, and other identifying details have been omitted.

4. GENERAL CONTEXT, 2014–2025

4.1. Crimea and Donbas, 2014: The outbreak of war and the beginning of religious repression

The annexation of Crimea and the instigation of the armed conflict in Donbas in 2014 marked the beginning of Russia's prolonged war against Ukraine. From the outset, the occupied territories were used as a testing ground for the introduction and gradual refinement of repressive practices. In the first years of occupation in Crimea and parts of the Donetsk and Luhansk regions, Russian authorities began imposing Russian law, pursuing aggressive Russification policies, and exerting pressure on religious communities associated with Ukrainian national identity or deemed disloyal to the new authorities. The persecution of churches of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church–Kyiv Patriarchate, the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church, Protestant communities, and Crimean Tatar Muslim communities became early indicators that freedom of religion in the occupied territories was treated not as a guaranteed right, but as a controllable and tightly restricted resource.

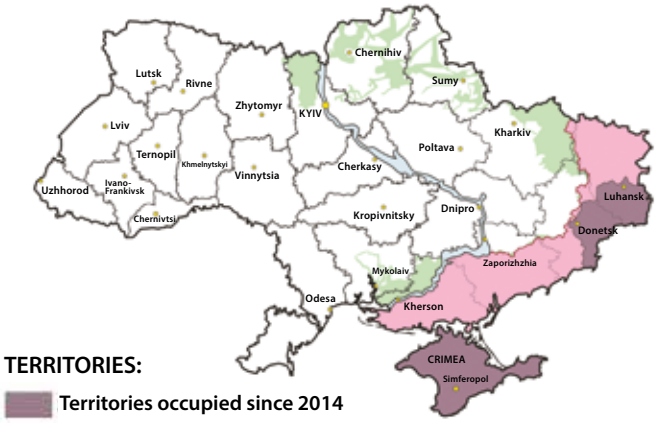
4.2. 2022: Escalation of the war and religious terror

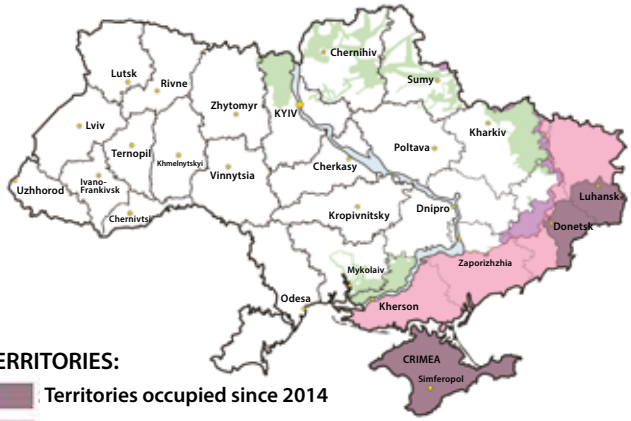
The Russian Federation's full-scale invasion in February 2022 did not mark the beginning of hostilities, but rather a new and far more brutal phase of a years-long armed aggression and occupation of Ukrainian territory. At the same time, it signaled the rapid expansion of the model of religious genocide that had already taken shape in Crimea and the Donbas into newly seized regions. From the outset, newly occupied areas of the Zaporizhzhia, Kherson, Donetsk, and Luhansk regions were subjected to systematic terror against local religious communities and their leaders. In 2022–2023, waves of mass searches of churches and mosques were documented, along with arrests and abductions of clergy, confiscation of places of worship, the forced closure of religious communities, and the conversion of some religious buildings into military facilities or administrative premises. These practices created an atmosphere of constant danger for believers.

4.3. Scale of occupation: Russia's territorial gains and their human cost

Comparative maps illustrate the expansion of occupied territories in 2022–2023 and the relatively limited territorial changes as of 2025.

Dynamics of the Occupation of Ukrainian Territory: 2014, 2022–2023, and 2025





According to assessments by Western analytical centers and media outlets, in 2025 Russia captured approximately 4,000–5,500 square kilometers of Ukrainian territory, representing about 0.7–0.9 percent of Ukraine's prewar territory (france24) (alarabiya). Despite these relatively limited territorial gains, Russian military losses have been enormous. Estimates by the United States and The Economist indicate that since the start of the full-scale invasion, the Russian Federation has suffered approximately 800,000 to 1 million total casualties, including killed and wounded. Of these losses, an estimated 100,000 were killed in the first half of 2025 alone (russiamatters) (washingtonpost) (themoscowtimes).

4.4. Russia's domestic repressive context as a foundation for external aggression

The Russian Federation has waged its aggressive war against Ukraine against the backdrop of a consistent and systematic suppression of religious freedom within its own territory. Over the past decade, Russia has constructed a rigid legislative framework for state control over religion. The 2016 "Yarovaya package" significantly restricted missionary activity by introducing, among other measures, punitive mechanisms for so-called "illegal missionary activity." This was followed by the tightening of legislation on "extremism" and "terrorism," the expansion of the "foreign agent" and "undesirable organization" regimes as applied to religious associations, and, in 2021, the introduction of additional state oversight of religious education and missionary work.

In 2022, wartime censorship provisions on "discrediting the army" were introduced and have since been used against clergy and preachers for anti-war prayers, sermons, and social media posts (khpg).

At the same time, the number of criminal and administrative cases against so-called "non-traditional" religious communities, nonprofit organizations, and human rights defenders continues to grow. These actors are increasingly labeled as "extremists," "terrorists," or "foreign agents," effectively pushing any independent religious voice out of the public sphere (uscirf).

- As of 2025, USCIRF reports that "hundreds of prisoners" in Russia are serving sentences for exercising freedom of conscience and religion. Among them are Jehovah's Witnesses, Muslims, Protestant leaders, and other religious activists, although the data do not provide monthly or multi-year breakdowns by denomination (uscirf.gov).
- According to the Russian Ministry of Justice, as of May 23, 2025, the registry of "foreign agents" in the Russian Federation contained 997 entries, while the total number of individuals and organizations ever designated as "foreign agents" has already exceeded 1,000 (myseldon.com).
- During the years of the full-scale invasion, the number of administrative cases brought against believers has continued to rise, along with the total amount of fines imposed under these provisions. The total value of fines increased from 2.98 million rubles in 2020 to 4.75 million rubles in 2024, and in the first half of 2025 alone, 2.34 million rubles had already been collected (sova-center.ru).

The Mission Eurasia report *An Analysis of the State of Religious Freedom in the Russian Federation* (2026) summarizes and systematizes data on the state of religious freedom in Russia. The report examines the transformation of Russia's religious policy from 1990 to 2025 and its connection to the ideology of the "Russian world," the war against Ukraine, and the consolidation of the country's authoritarian regime. The study draws on a comprehensive body of sources, including Russian and international legislation, court practice, monitoring by Russian and international human rights organizations (HRW, Forum 18, OVD-Info, USCIRF, HRWF, OHCHR, among others), publicly available court and official Russian statistics, as well as reports and interviews with believers, including forcibly displaced persons and victims of religious persecution.

4.5. Transformation of religious life in Ukraine and the response of churches

Against the backdrop of destruction and loss, the war has simultaneously brought about a profound transformation of religious life in Ukraine. Churches across denominations have developed extensive diaconal ministries, including parish-based aid centers, field kitchens, shelters for internally displaced persons, chaplaincy service within the armed forces, and psychological support for those affected by the war. Many communities have evolved from local parishes into regional humanitarian hubs, significantly expanding their social role (razumkov.org.ua).

At the same time, sociological surveys and analytical studies indicate that the war has exposed new challenges, including fatigue, trauma, theological and ethical dilemmas, and tensions between peacemaking narratives and the perceived necessity of armed defense (razumkov.org.ua). Subsequent chapters of this report examine in greater detail both the direct repression of religious communities in the occupied territories and the strategies of survival, ministry, and solidarity developed by churches in the context of a prolonged war.

Conclusions:

1. The full-scale invasion of 2022 was not the beginning of the war, but a sharp expansion of an already established model of armed aggression and occupation that had first been tested in Crimea and the Donbas.

2. In the occupied territories, alongside active hostilities, a system of control over religious communities is being put in place, aimed at erasing Ukrainian, Crimean Tatar, and other "disloyal" identities.

3. Russian aggression has been accompanied by the large-scale destruction of religious infrastructure, as well as the killing and persecution of clergy and believers—issues examined in detail in the following sections of this report.

4. The repressive legal and ideological framework within the Russian Federation provides the foundation for a policy of religious persecution in the occupied territories: it supplies the tools to criminalize "disloyal" religious communities, legitimizes violence, and enables this model of repression to be exported beyond Russia's borders to occupied regions of Ukraine.

5. The war has radically transformed religious life: churches have become key humanitarian hubs while simultaneously confronting exhaustion, trauma, and complex theological and ethical challenges.

5. IMPACT OF THE WAR ON RELIGIOUS LIFE IN UKRAINE: OVERALL PICTURE, 2022–2025

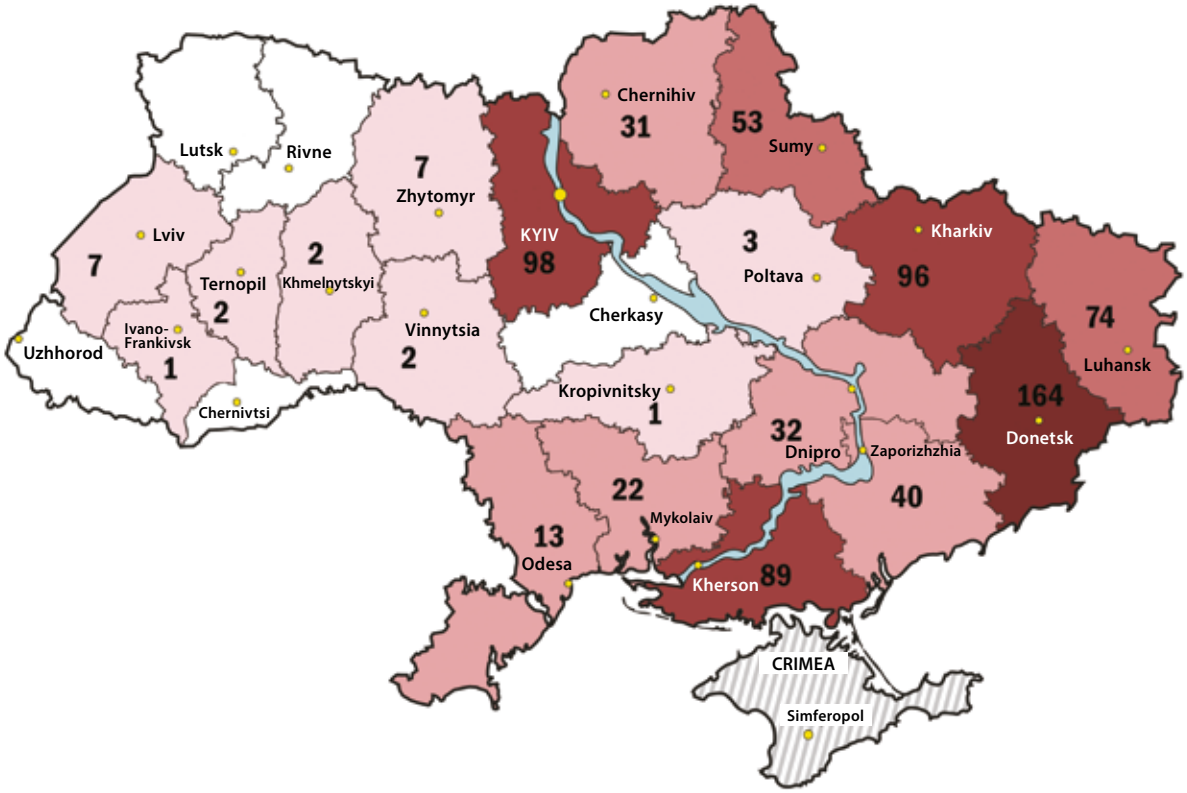
5.1. Overall scale of destruction of religious infrastructure in Ukraine

Over four years of the full-scale war, Ukraine's religious infrastructure has suffered unprecedented losses. In statements issued in 2025, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Ukraine confirmed that Russian forces damaged or destroyed more than 640 places of worship, the majority of which were Christian churches, but also including mosques, synagogues, and other facilities belonging to religious communities (M3C).

According to the *Religion on Fire* project, as of December 16, 2025, at least 737 religious buildings had been documented as damaged or destroyed as a result of Russian aggression (mar.in.ua).

Map: Destroyed Church Buildings in Ukraine

(based on data from the Religion on Fire project as of December 16, 2025)



As of December 16, 2025, 737 places of worship in Ukraine have been damaged or completely destroyed.

These data correlate with earlier reports by the Institute for Religious Freedom and international organizations, which document a steady increase in attacks on churches, mosques, synagogues, and religious educational institutions between 2022 and 2024 (IRF). The greatest losses have been recorded in the Donetsk, Luhansk, Kharkiv, and Kherson regions, as well as in the city of Kyiv and Kyiv region.

- On March 19, 2025, a nighttime shelling damaged the St. Nicholas Episcopal Monastery of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church (Moscow Patriarchate) in Myropillia, Sumy region. Source: (Суспільне).

- On March 29, 2025, the Church of St. John Chrysostom of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church in Pokrovsk, Donetsk region, was completely destroyed. Source: (uoc-news.church).
- On July 15, 2025, a Russian airstrike on the village of Bytytsia in the Sumy region severely damaged the Church of the Holy Right-Believing Prince Alexander Nevsky. Source: (uoc-news.church).
- On June 29, 2025, fragments of a Russian missile damaged a church and bell tower in the village of Vasiuchyn, Ivano-Frankivsk region. Source: (Суспільне)
- On July 7, 2025, shelling destroyed a local Ukrainian Orthodox Church building in the village of Zolotyi Kolodiaz, Donetsk region. Source: (Church).
- On November 13, 2025, damage was reported to the Church of Saint Blessed Prince Ihor of Chernihiv in Kostiantynivka, Donetsk Oblast, as a result of shelling.Source: (Church).

5.2. Intensified shelling of churches and prayer houses in frontline regions

The majority of documented cases of damage to religious buildings have occurred in frontline and occupied areas—primarily in Donbas, southern Ukraine, and Kharkiv Oblast—as well as in cities regularly targeted by missile and drone attacks (Слово). Strikes on churches and other religious sites frequently take place during worship services or humanitarian aid distributions, when the number of people inside is at its highest.

The overall picture includes not only direct hits on churches, but also systematic damage to monasteries, theological seminaries, religious educational institutions, chapels, and prayer rooms in hospitals and social facilities. In some cases, religious buildings have been used by Russian forces as ammunition depots, observation posts, or troop positions. This practice itself constitutes a violation of international humanitarian law and effectively turns these sites into military targets, further increasing the risks faced by civilians and worshippers (IPC).

5.3. Killed clergy

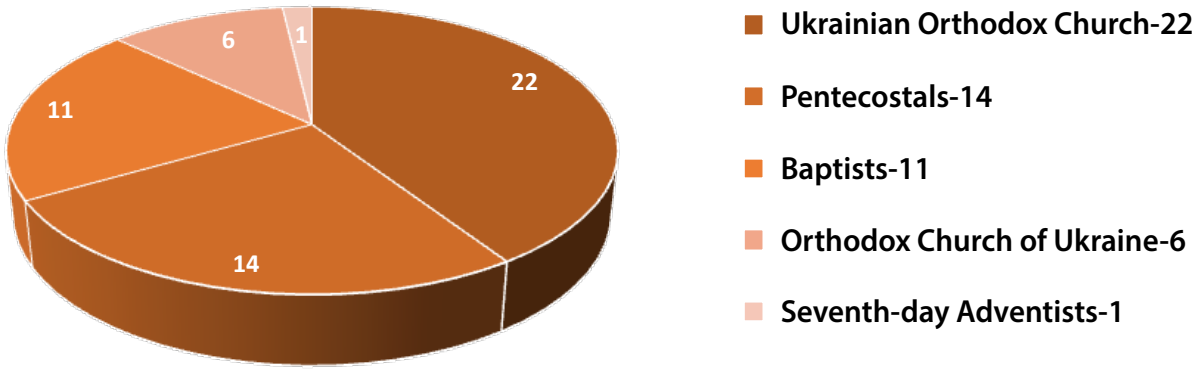
According to official estimates by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Ukraine, as of spring 2025 Russian military forces had killed at least 67 clergy members, pastors, and monks from various denominations (M3C). Some were killed in the occupied territories for refusing to cooperate with the occupation administration or for publicly opposing the aggression, while others lost their lives during shelling of churches and houses of prayer while fulfilling their pastoral duty alongside their communities.

Within Mission Eurasia's *Book of Remembrance of the War* project, independent research is conducted and several databases are maintained documenting clergy who were killed in both occupied territories and areas under Ukrainian government control.

As of December 1, 2025, the database of fallen clergy who were civilians and continued their ministry until the end includes 54 individuals.

Chart: Killed Clergy

Updated data from Mission Eurasia's Book of Remembrance of the War: Clergy project as of December 1, 2025



These clergy members were killed in various regions of Ukraine as a result of arrests, abductions, torture, and abuse by Russian forces in the occupied territories; executions at checkpoints; targeted shelling of civilian populations; and indiscriminate attacks on civilian infrastructure using artillery, missiles, and aerial bombs.

Mission Eurasia's *Book of Remembrance of the War* project applies a highly conservative methodology in its counts, including in its database only those individuals who held official church ministry positions. In addition, as of today, the database records 16 clergy members who were killed after being mobilized or after voluntarily joining the Armed Forces of Ukraine. The database of fallen chaplains includes 10 individuals.

- On November 19, 2025, in Ternopil, a Russian missile strike on a residential apartment building killed Bohdan Hnatiievych, a minister of the "Love and Healing" Evangelical Church and dean of the Biblical Leadership College, along with his mother, Vira (Podii).
- On September 20, 2025, Leonid Skumatov, a presbyter of an Evangelical Baptist church in Myrnohrad, Donetsk region, was killed while assisting civilians during a Russian drone attack (facebook).
- On September 7, 2025, while evacuating people from under enemy shelling, Archpriest Volodymyr (Shutov) of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church in the village of Oleksandrove was killed (risu.ua).
- On July 15, 2025, during shelling of a men's monastery of the Kharkiv Eparchy of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church, Archimandrite Petro (Kryvytskyi) was killed (eparchia.kharkov).
- On June 1, 2025, as a result of shelling of a Ukrainian Orthodox Church in the village of Ternuvate, Zaporizhzhia region, Olha Synelnykova, the choir director, sustained injuries incompatible with life (hramzp).
- On February 27, 2025, occupying forces attacked a civilian vehicle carrying humanitarian aid with a drone in the Dnipropetrovsk region. As a result, Roman Hryhurko, senior minister of the Ukrainian Evangelical Church in the village of Novokyivka, was killed, and his wife was hospitalized in intensive care with severe injuries (Espreso).

Information about fallen clergy continues to be updated not only as a result of ongoing military operations. Monitoring of the situation in the occupied territories also reveals new facts about crimes committed by Russian forces. According to the Kharkiv Human Rights Group, the fate of 20 priests abducted by Russian occupying forces since the beginning of the full-scale invasion remains unknown (CCL) (hromadske).

Map: Number of Fallen Clergy by Region of Ukraine

As of December 1, 2025, Mission Eurasia's *Book of Remembrance of the War* documents 54 cases of fallen clergy.

Mission Eurasia's *Book of Remembrance of the War* project does not seek to present the highest possible number of deaths. The loss of even a single minister is already a tragedy for their family, their congregation, and society as a whole.

5.4. Injured believers and members of their families

Alongside those who have been killed, there is a less formalized but no less significant category of victims: clergy and laypeople who have been wounded or permanently injured. In the context of war, churches and houses of prayer in Ukraine have become not only places of worship, but also centers of humanitarian assistance, shelters, and facilities for internally displaced persons. For this reason, attacks on these buildings often result in mass civilian casualties, including children. Human rights organizations and Ukrainian media have documented dozens of cases in which clergy, their spouses, and children were injured during the shelling of churches, parish buildings, church-based humanitarian centers, and volunteer vehicles (t4pua.org).

Although there is no unified national statistic on believers injured in attacks on religious sites, thematic studies and selective monitoring, including reports by the Institute for Religious Freedom, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, and the *Religion on Fire* project, indicate that each new escalation along the front line is almost always accompanied by new victims among parishioners, volunteers, and ministers who remain with their communities and continue their service under fire (IPC).

- On November 29, 2025, on Kharkivske Highway in Kyiv, a Khinzhal missile wounded Pastor Yevhen Salfetnikov from Druzhkivka and his wife. Glass fragments injured their faces, the pastor partially lost his hearing, and a church minibus was completely destroyed (espreso).

- On September 28, 2025, during a nighttime attack on Kyiv, a Russian missile destroyed the home of Mark Serhieiev, a pastor of the Melitopol Christian Church and a volunteer. At the moment of the strike, he was asleep with his wife, while their children were on the floor above. The pastor managed to pull them from the rubble before the house burned down. This was the second time Russia deprived Mark Serhieiev's family of their home, as Russian forces had seized their house in occupied territory in 2022 (vsirazom).
- On January 30, 2025, in Pokrovsk, a Russian drone struck a vehicle belonging to the NGO "Baza UA" during the evacuation of civilians. A 28-year-old British volunteer named Edward, who had been serving in Ukraine since 2022, lost an arm and a leg (suspilne).

As of February 2025, the United Nations estimates total casualties among humanitarian workers at no fewer than 25 killed and 86 wounded. During the first nine months of 2025 alone, an additional four humanitarian workers were killed and 34 wounded as a result of shelling, drone strikes, and missile attacks in frontline regions (unocha).

In the Kharkiv region alone, according to the Coordination Center for Assistance, 30 volunteers delivering humanitarian aid to frontline communities have been killed since the beginning of the full-scale invasion (gwaramedia).

5.5. Refugee clergy and churches in dispersion

The war has caused unprecedented levels of forced displacement. As of the summer of 2025, Ukraine has approximately 3.7 million internally displaced persons and an estimated 5.7–5.8 million Ukrainian refugees abroad (UNHCR). A significant share of those displaced are active members of church communities, and thousands of priests, pastors, deacons, missionaries, and church workers have been forced to leave their parishes in occupied or frontline areas.

Population displacement in Ukraine as a result of the war

External migration: 5.8 million people

Internal migration: 3.7 million people

As a result, a phenomenon of "churches in dispersion" has emerged. Congregations from Mariupol, Melitopol, Berdiansk, and the Kherson region have been reestablished in western regions of Ukraine and in EU countries, forming migrant or displaced parishes. Some churches continue to provide informal pastoral care to people who remain in the occupied territories through online worship services, remote pastoral ministry, and humanitarian networks. Research by Ukrainian analytical centers and scholars of religion indicates that religious communities have become among the key institutions for refugee integration, the preservation of identity, and the mobilization of solidarity resources abroad (razumkov).

Conclusions:

1. Ukraine's religious infrastructure suffered unprecedented destruction in 2022–2025. Hundreds of churches, monasteries, and houses of prayer were damaged or destroyed, particularly in frontline and occupied regions.

2. Losses among clergy have been systemic and widespread. Even the most conservative accounting by Mission Eurasia's *Book of Remembrance of the War* documents dozens of pastors, priests, and chaplains from various denominations who were killed as a result of shelling, torture, abductions, and executions for refusing to cooperate with the occupying forces.

3. Injuries sustained by clergy, volunteers, and parishioners highlight the particular vulnerability of religious communities during the war. Numerous cases demonstrate that attacks on civilian infrastructure often affect churches, houses of prayer, and associated humanitarian initiatives, inflicting severe harm on believers and their families.

4. The forced displacement of millions of Ukrainians has given rise to the phenomenon of "churches in dispersion." Congregations from occupied cities have been reestablished in safer regions of Ukraine and abroad, becoming key centers for refugee integration, mutual assistance, and the preservation of religious and national identity.

5. Despite destruction, human losses, and sustained pressure, Ukraine's religious communities remain a core source of resilience and solidarity, combining spiritual ministry, humanitarian support, care for the affected, and public testimony about the war crimes of the Russian Federation.

6. CRIMES OF THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION IN THE OCCUPIED TERRITORIES OF UKRAINE

6.1. Overall dynamics of repression

After February 24, 2022, the occupied territories of Ukraine became a space of systematic persecution of religious communities, particularly those associated with Ukrainian identity. The first phase (2022–early 2023) was marked primarily by "chaotic" violence: killings, abductions, torture, and enforced disappearances of priests, pastors, and active lay believers. Subsequently, under pressure from international institutions, Russia began shifting a significant portion of these repressions into a formally "legal" framework—through administrative cases, forced passportization, property confiscation, and criminal convictions on charges of "extremism," "terrorism," and "espionage." However, the violent component of repression did not disappear.

Pastor Dmytro Bodiuk of the Word of Life Church describes his time in captivity as follows: "The first interrogations were conducted by the military, the FSB, and counterintelligence. They checked all the phones and computers, asking who this person was, who that person was. The military immediately said, 'Our task is to kill you. You have a one-way ticket; go and pray'" (radiosvoboda).

6.2. Administrative pressure on religious leaders: raids, searches, fines, and administrative proceedings

Later, in 2024–2025, under pressure from international institutions, the focus of Russian repression in the occupied territories gradually shifted away from overt physical violence toward more "legalized" forms of repression, including administrative fines, bans on religious activity, and criminal cases on charges of "extremism" or "espionage." Violence did not disappear, but it has increasingly been supplemented by creeping forms of administrative control. Searches, armed raids on churches, interrogations of clergy, deportations, abuses related to passportization and mobilization continue. Mass inspections, especially during major Christian holidays, are accompanied by the presence of armed soldiers in places of worship, document checks, threats, and the confiscation of religious literature and equipment. This creates an atmosphere of constant pressure on clergy and religious communities.

- On 20 February 2025, the so called "Illichivsk Interdistrict Court" in Mariupol fined a church minister 5,000 rubles under Article 5.26 of the Russian Code of Administrative Offences for leading an unregistered religious community. The fine entered into force on 3 March 2025 (Forum 18).
- On 2 March 2025, officers of the Federal Security Service (FSB) and the so-called LPR Center for Combating Extremism carried out a raid during a worship service of an unregistered Baptist congregation in Kadiivka (Stakhanov). They seized religious materials and issued an administrative protocol under Article 5.26 of the Russian Code of Administrative Offences ("illegal missionary activity") (Forum 18).
- On May 30, 2025, police acting on instructions from the FSB searched a church of the Council of Churches of Evangelical Christians-Baptists (CCECB) in Luhansk, threatened to seal the church building, and demanded the names of leaders and the schedule of services. This constituted direct pressure aimed at the forced "legalization" of the community (Forum 18).
- Pastor Volodymyr Rytykov of the Council of Baptist Churches in Krasnodon was repeatedly fined for "illegal missionary activity" following the dispersal of worship services. In April 2024, the so-called "court" imposed another fine and later added an additional penalty for "non-payment" (forum18.org).

Reports by the United Nations, the Council of Europe, and USCIRF document systematic cases in which priests who refuse to transfer to the Russian Orthodox Church or who do not openly support the occupation regime are subjected to administrative prosecution, forced to cease their ministry, or compelled to leave the territory. Religious communities with a distinct Ukrainian identity are particularly vulnerable, including the Orthodox Church of Ukraine, the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church, segments of the Protestant community, as well as Muslim communities and Jehovah's Witnesses.

6.3. Abuse of passportization, filtration measures in churches, and forced deportation

Fines and deportations for "illegal missionary activity" or "violations of passport regulations" have become a widespread practice. Russian authorities routinely carry out filtration measures and checks in the occupied territories to identify those deemed disloyal, including individuals who refuse to obtain Russian passports or who use prohibited communication applications. Special scrutiny is directed at those whose lack of a Russian passport is discovered during filtration procedures conducted at worship services or home group meetings. Subsequently, such individuals are denied residence permits.

There are documented cases in which the families of clergy, following such refusals, are subjected to forced deportation. Land plots, homes, and other property belonging to deported clergy or to those who refused to cooperate and left the occupied territories are seized without court orders under the pretext of "abandoned property." According to UN assessments, these practices combine violations of freedom of religion, freedom of movement, and the right to housing and property, and exhibit characteristics of the forced alteration of the demographic composition of the occupied regions.

- In the occupied Donetsk region, Russian occupation authorities fined and ordered the deportation to the Russian Federation of two priests of the Orthodox Church of Ukraine—Father Khrystofor (Viacheslav Khrimli) and Archpriest Andrii Chuia—for "violating Russian legislation on missionary activity" (shaltnotkill).
- A family of a minister from the Zaporizhzhia region, including minor children, was forcibly deported under the pretext of violating passport regulations (OI-63).

6.4. Criminal cases against clergy and lay believers

Show trials and criminal prosecutions against clergy and active lay believers have become a key instrument of intimidation. The occupation authorities use controlled "courts" to persecute those who refuse to cooperate, bringing charges of "espionage," "terrorism," and "extremism." In recent years, the Russian Federation has significantly expanded the legislative framework for such charges, allowing ordinary pastoral, human rights, or volunteer activity to be classified as a criminal offense. These cases are often accompanied by prolonged detention in isolation and torture and frequently result in lengthy sentences in high-security penal colonies, intended to intimidate religious communities and suppress any manifestations of disloyalty.

Reports by OHCHR and USCIRF for 2024–2025 document dozens of criminal proceedings against religious leaders and parishioners in the occupied territories, including charges of "discrediting the Russian army," "propaganda of extremism," and "links to the Ukrainian military" ((irf.in.ua). These cases involve not only priests, but also volunteers, Sunday school teachers, musicians, and youth leaders, who are targeted precisely because of their public and religious activity (UNHCR).

As of 2025, several Ukrainian clergy from the occupied territories remain imprisoned on politically motivated charges, while some sentences have been issued with suspended enforcement, creating an additional instrument of pressure and coercion.

- **Father Kostiantyn Maksymov**, a priest of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church and rector of the Church of the Dormition of the Mother of God in Tokmak, refused to join the Russian Orthodox Church or accept a Russian passport after the city was occupied. On 16 May 2023, he was detained at the Chongar checkpoint and subsequently held for nine months in isolation, where he was subjected to torture. On 8 February 2024, an occupation court sentenced him under Article 276 of the Russian Criminal Code to 14 years in a maximum-security penal colony on charges of "espionage" (Мемориал).
- **Priest Feognost (Tymofii Pushkov)** of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church was arrested in the occupied Luhansk region following searches and interrogations for criticizing the war and the Russian Orthodox Church. In September 2024, a court handed him a four-year suspended sentence on a fabricated charge of drug possession (forum18.org).

- **Marharyta Kharenko**, a youth ministry worker of a Protestant church and a volunteer, was sentenced in April 2024 by the Southern District Court in Rostov-on-Don to 20 years of imprisonment on charges of an "attempt on the life of a Russian serviceman" and "espionage" (ZMINA).

6.5. Confiscation of church buildings and property

During 2022–2023, in the occupied territories of the Zaporizhzhia and Kherson regions, the Russian occupation authorities effectively banned the activities of most religious organizations, with the exception of Orthodox structures loyal to the Moscow Patriarchate. Russian military forces carried out raids and searches in churches and in the homes of clergy, interrogating religious leaders. During these searches, church records, mobile phones, computers, and other property were confiscated. Worship services in church buildings were prohibited, and many buildings were seized, looted, or repurposed for the needs of the occupying authorities.

Across the occupied territories, all Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church (UGCC) churches were closed, and the activities of the New Generation and Revival church movements, along with the vast majority of other Protestant churches, were banned (OI-11, 38, 50). According to monitoring by Mission Eurasia's Religious Freedom project, in Melitopol alone the occupation authorities seized the buildings of 15 churches: 10 Protestant congregations, three Orthodox Church of Ukraine (OCU) parishes, and two UGCC churches (OI-4, 9, 56).

All Jehovah's Witness properties were also confiscated: in the Donetsk and Luhansk regions, at least 17 Kingdom Halls were seized, while in Crimea all 22 congregations were deregistered, stripping them of the legal right to use their own buildings.

As for churches and communities of the Orthodox Church of Ukraine, their buildings were closed, sealed, or transferred under the control of the Russian Orthodox Church (Texty). Some clergy of the Orthodox Church of Ukraine fled the occupied territories, while others continue to serve clandestinely, holding worship services in private homes.

- In Mariupol, the Russian Orthodox Church appropriated a church belonging to the Orthodox Church of Ukraine and announced plans to "bring it into compliance with ROC canons," effectively altering a unique architectural structure (hromadske).
- An Orthodox Church of Ukraine building in the Novoazovsk district was converted into a morgue (dw_com).
- The Church of the Ascension in the village of Lukashivka, Chernihiv region, was used by Russian forces as a headquarters; after liberation, the bodies of local residents who had been killed and tortured were found inside the building (Вёрстка).
- One Protestant church in Melitopol is being used as a club (investigator.org.ua). Another church building was converted into a cultural and sports entertainment complex Вёрстка), while the premises of three other churches were occupied by security forces (istories.media). In total, the occupation authorities seized the buildings and property complexes of 15 churches in the city.
- In Molochansk, the occupation authorities seized the buildings of a Mennonite church and a charitable foundation and repurposed them as offices for Russia's ruling party, United Russia (Вёрстка). The church's worship hall is being used as a workshop for repairing sewage equipment (OI-55).

6.6. The so-called "registration" of religious communities in the occupied territories

From late 2023 onward, after most active and influential religious leaders had been forced out of the occupied territories through threats, forced deportations, and in some cases killings, the occupation authorities launched a campaign of "re-registering religious communities under Russian law." As part of this campaign, the remaining clergy were subjected to constant pressure. They were compelled to obtain Russian passports and to urge their parishioners to do the same "for the purpose of registering the church." In this way, people's religious convictions are being used as a tool of coercion to enforce the compulsory passportization of the Ukrainian population.

There are documented cases in which the appointment of new community leaders has been carried out "in coordination with the local authorities." Communities were directly told who must be appointed as their leader, with warnings that registration would otherwise be denied (OI-46). Additional conditions for registration have included bans on the use of the Ukrainian language during worship services, singing, and everyday communication, as well as prohibitions on praying for Ukraine or for those who have relocated to territories controlled by Kyiv (OI-35).

As of 2025, in most towns and settlements no more than one Protestant church has been officially registered (including Tokmak, Yakymivka, Kamyanka, Enerhodar, Pryshyb, Novobohdanivka, and Polohy). Prior to the occupation, each Christian denomination in these localities had its own church, and in some cases more than one. As a result, the occupation authorities, in a manner reminiscent of the Soviet period, deliberately force believers of different denominations to gather within a single local congregation. This creates tensions arising from differences in religious practices and weakens both interchurch unity and the overall influence of religious communities.

Another lever of pressure used to force registration involved promises that, through mediation by leaders of Russian religious organizations at the highest levels of government, communities in the occupied territories would have their confiscated buildings and property returned.

As a result, community leaders and parishioners in the occupied territories found themselves subject to new rules and arrangements that were often alien to them. Their expectations, however, proved unfounded: church buildings confiscated in 2022–2023 have not been returned even to those communities that accepted the occupation authorities' conditions, obtained Russian passports, re-registered under Russian law, and joined officially sanctioned confessional hierarchies. The seized buildings continue to be used by the occupation administration for its own purposes, including military, administrative, and propaganda activities.

Seized *Grace* Church, Melitopol, repurposed by the occupying authorities as a cultural center.

6.7. Repression against unregistered religious communities

The occupation of Ukrainian territories has become a serious ordeal for members of unregistered religious communities. Throughout Ukraine's years of independence, national legislation did not prohibit the activity of unregistered religious groups, and many such communities existed openly. After the occupation, they were automatically pushed outside the law, as Russian legislation prohibits holding meetings and worship services, Bible study, missionary activity, and children's and youth ministries without official registration. While within Russia the authorities had for years effectively tolerated the existence of such communities, allowing them to function and develop, in the occupied territories intolerable conditions were created for them in a very short time: constant inspections, the threat of fines, searches, and the forced closure of gatherings.

The ongoing pattern of repression can be illustrated by the case of one religious community in occupied Melitopol:

- Throughout 2023, as well as on September 18 and November 10, 2024, armed raids were carried out during worship services at the church of the Council of Churches of Evangelical Christians-Baptists (CCECB) in Melitopol by the so-called "Center for Combating Extremism." The raids included inspections of the premises, document checks, and interrogations of the pastor and church ministers. (ecoi.net)
- In late 2024, three administrative cases were opened against Pastor Dmytro Malakhov: for "illegal missionary activity," for failure to notify the authorities of the start of a religious group's activities, and for indicating an incomplete official name. On December 18, 2024, the court dismissed one case due to the statute of limitations, issued a warning in the second case, and postponed consideration of the third until January 2025. (ecoi.net)
- On March 27, 2025, following a civil lawsuit filed by the prosecutor's office, the Russian "Melitopol Interdistrict Court" ordered the religious community, represented by Dmytro Malakhov, to submit written notification to the authorities about the start of the religious group's activities, including details of its beliefs, meeting locations, leader, and the full names and addresses of all participants. The pastor filed an appeal, citing the Russian Constitution and personal data protection laws (Forum 18).
- In June 2025, Forum 18 reports that Malakhov has refused to comply with the court order, continuing to challenge the requirement of de facto registration and the transfer of personal data of all members of the unregistered community. As of now, no final decision on the appeal has been reported in open sources (Forum 18).

6.8. Home groups

Ukrainian churches have long made wide use of home group meetings as part of their religious life. The occupation brought direct bans on such gatherings. Initially, these restrictions were justified by "martial law" and prohibitions on assemblies and meetings (OI-20, 49). Later, home group meetings began to be banned "in accordance with Russian legislation" (OI-38, 47). There are documented cases in which authorities even confiscated private homes where home churches and small group meetings were held (OI-46).

Pressure on home groups has particularly affected Protestant believers, for whom home groups and informal gatherings are a core element of community life. Banning these groups means not only a legal restriction but the effective destruction of a form of spiritual practice central to these communities.

There are documented cases in which local collaborators, motivated by religious hostility, report the locations of home-group meetings and so-called "unreliable" individuals to security forces. As a result, searches and arrests of believers follow. One known case involves Olena, a Sunday school teacher from a Protestant church, who was arrested essentially for praying for Ukraine during a home-group meeting. She was ultimately charged with "discrediting the Russian army" and sentenced to a prison term with a suspended sentence (ECOI).

Most cases of arrests and threats remain non-public, but Mission Eurasia continues to monitor these incidents and seeks to assist in securing the release of those detained.

6.9. Establishment of a controlled religious hierarchy in the occupied territories

Alongside the occupation, a model of rigid, state-controlled religious hierarchy characteristic of the Russian Federation has been imposed on the occupied Ukrainian territories. Orthodox parishes of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church (Moscow Patriarchate) that remained in these areas have been systematically transferred under the authority of the Russian Orthodox Church. Six of the seven former Ukrainian dioceses of the UOC (MP) were incorporated into the structure of the Russian Orthodox Church without open resistance.

Only in the Berdiansk Diocese did the ruling bishop, Ephrem (Yarynko), openly oppose the transfer; however, he was not supported by the majority of the clergy. He was soon removed and first replaced by Bishop Luka (Volchkov), and later by Bishop Feodor (Belkov).

Even in dioceses that formally supported the transition from the Ukrainian Orthodox Church (Moscow Patriarchate) to the Russian Orthodox Church, local clergy are being systematically replaced by appointees from Russia.

- After the annexation of the Donetsk diocese of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church (Moscow Patriarchate), the Holy Synod of the Russian Orthodox Church removed Metropolitan Ilarion (Shukalo), a Ukrainian citizen, and appointed Metropolitan Vladimir (Samokhin), a cleric of the Russian Orthodox Church originally from Russia's Ryazan region, as head of the diocese (Public Orthodoxy).
- In October 2023, Archbishop Lazar, an ethnic Ukrainian who headed the Simferopol and Crimean Metropolis, was replaced by Metropolitan Tikhon (Shevkunov), who had previously led the Pskov Metropolis of the Russian Orthodox Church (ОБЪЕКТИВ).
- In 2024, a parish of the Russian Orthodox Church dedicated to the Dormition of the Mother of God appeared in Russia's Unified State Register of Legal Entities. The parish lists Priest Mykola Ronzhyn as its rector. It is known that this parish had previously been served by Ukrainian Orthodox Church priest Kostyantyn Maksymov, who was later sentenced by a Russian "court" (РусПрофиль).

Research by Public Orthodoxy shows that only about 56 percent of parish priests serving in Orthodox parishes in the occupied territories are the same clergy who served there before the war and later transferred from the Ukrainian Orthodox Church to the jurisdiction of the Russian Orthodox Church. The remaining 44 percent of parish priests were appointed after the occupation, according to an analysis of church registration data in Russia and Ukraine. The authors directly link this shift to the mass departure of local clergy and the deliberate "import" of priests from Russian dioceses as part of an effort to establish a religious hierarchy controlled from Moscow (orthodoxy).

A small number of Protestant congregations that have agreed to register in the occupied territories since 2024 have likewise been absorbed into hierarchical religious structures and are compelled to comply simultaneously with the strict requirements of Russian law and with confessional subordination within religious unions.

Muslim communities, particularly Crimean Tatar communities, face repression amid the forced dissolution of registered congregations, the closure of Islamic schools and mosques, and criminal prosecutions on charges of "terrorism" or "extremism" for participation in ordinary religious gatherings or possession of religious literature. At the same time, the authorities engage selectively with representatives of Muslim communities who agree to demonstrate loyalty to the Kremlin. The article *"Freedom of Religion in Temporarily Occupied Crimea: Who Shapes What Is Said in Mosques After the Occupation"* describes in detail how Russian authorities, through loyal "spiritual administrations" and security services, exercise control over Muslim communities, determine who may serve as an imam and what sermons may address, and apply repression against communities deemed undesirable (svidomi).

In this way, a Moscow-controlled religious hierarchy is being formed, designed not only to secure the loyalty of the clergy but also to function as a tool of ideological control over the population of the occupied territories.

Ukraine's Ministry of Foreign Affairs and international organizations emphasize that the Russian Orthodox Church plays an active role in legitimizing the aggression and in justifying repression against communities deemed "disloyal."

6.10. Occupied territories as a "laboratory" for suppressing religious freedom

A broad review of the occupied territories makes it possible to conclude that they have effectively become a "laboratory" for testing and refining Russia's repressive practices in the religious sphere.

For example, during the occupation of Crimea, the number of registered religious communities on the peninsula decreased from 2,083 to 907. Churches of the Orthodox Church of Ukraine have been confiscated or closed; the Mejlis of the Crimean Tatar people has been banned; and its members have been subjected to constant pressure, arrests, and politically motivated trials (risu).

Overall, the number of parishes of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church that were subsequently incorporated into the Russian Orthodox Church declined by a factor of 1.4, while the number of Protestant communities fell by a factor of 3.6. Catholic presence has been almost entirely eliminated: of the 15 Roman Catholic parishes that existed prior to occupation, only one remains, and of the 49 parishes of the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church, none remain.

This confirms that the occupied territories are being used not only as a space for military aggression, but also as a testing ground for the systematic suppression of religious freedom and the destruction of Ukraine's religious, national, and cultural identity.

Of particular concern is the fact that Russia's model of strict, security-driven control over religious life is no longer limited to its domestic context and is increasingly becoming a model emulated in other countries. The influence of this approach is evident in a number of neighboring states and in countries sympathetic to authoritarian and "traditionalist" governance, where the Russian experience is cited as a reference point or used to justify expanded state control.

Human rights organizations emphasize that the destruction of the right to cultural, national, and religious identity became a core element of Russia's occupation policy—first in Crimea and now in other occupied territories. International monitoring bodies note that the combined framework of "traditional values," "countering extremism," and administrative-criminal pressure is gradually being replicated in a number of countries, particularly across the post-Soviet space (uscirf.gov).

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Conclusions:

1. The occupied territories of Ukraine show a severe and ongoing destruction of religious infrastructure, including the seizure of church buildings. The sharp decline in the number of religious communities in Crimea and the Donbas, the near-complete dismantling of the Catholic presence, and the widespread confiscation of property belonging to the Orthodox Church of Ukraine, the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church, Protestant churches, and Jehovah's Witnesses' Kingdom Halls reflect a sustained pattern rather than isolated or accidental incidents.

2. In 2024–2025, there is a clear shift from "chaotic" physical violence to formally "legalized" forms of repression. These include administrative fines, property seizures, and criminal prosecutions on charges such as "extremism," "terrorism," and "espionage," while the threat of torture and physical abuse has not disappeared.

3. Administrative pressure has become a routine method of intimidation against religious communities. Searches, armed raids, fines, summons for so-called "conversations," and accusations of improper use of premises have created a climate of constant insecurity for clergy and believers.

4. Demonstrative criminal cases against clergy and active lay believers—enabled by the expansion of Russia's repressive legal framework—function as a form of targeted terror, aimed at keeping the remaining members of religious communities under strict control.

5. Forced passportization, filtration measures, and the deportation of clergy and their families, or the creation of conditions that compel them to flee, have become key tools of demographic and religious engineering. These practices link religious repression with the deliberate reshaping of the demographic composition of the occupied territories.

6. The so-called "registration" of religious communities is used as a tool of coercion and assimilation, forcing clergy to accept Russian passports, abandon the use of the Ukrainian language and prayers for Ukraine, and submit to oversight by the local occupation authorities.

7. Targeted pressure on clergy who agree to re-register their communities continues to intensify. They are subjected to strict conditions regarding the language of worship, the content of sermons, expressions of loyalty to the Russian Federation, and the transfer of parishioners' personal data as a prerequisite for being allowed to hold gatherings legally.

8. The confiscation and desecration of places of worship have become a systematic element of occupation policy. Church buildings are not returned even to "re-registered" communities; instead, they are transferred under the control of the Russian Orthodox Church or repurposed as morgues, military headquarters, clubs, or offices of occupation structures, depriving communities of spaces for worship.

9. In the occupied territories, Russia is actively establishing a Moscow-controlled religious hierarchy. The replacement of local clergy with appointees of the Russian Orthodox Church, the subordination of Protestant and Muslim communities, and the systematic reduction of religious diversity together point to a model of religious repression that amounts to religious genocide.

10. Pressure is intensifying against specific groups and unregistered communities. Repressive practices first tested in the occupied territories against particular denominations and unregistered religious groups are increasingly being transferred to, and replicated within, the Russian Federation itself.

11. The occupied territories are increasingly functioning as a "laboratory" for Russian repressive practices in the religious sphere. The model refined there — combining the ideology of "traditional values," the rhetoric of combating "extremism," and the systematic erosion of religious diversity — is clearly demonstrated in Crimea and is gradually being reproduced in other authoritarian regimes.

7. CHILDREN, YOUTH, AND RELIGION UNDER OCCUPATION

The situation of Ukrainian children under occupation has been widely discussed on international platforms. The international community has condemned the abduction of children from occupied territories, leading the International Criminal Court to issue arrest warrants for Vladimir Putin and Maria Lvova-Belova, the Russian Federation's Presidential Commissioner for Children's Rights.

Monitoring of children's spiritual upbringing indicates that the actions of the Russian authorities in the occupied territories echo the practices of the communist regime at its darkest moments. In these conditions, children from religious families are particularly vulnerable.

Before the invasion, most churches—even in small villages—ran Sunday schools and children's programs. Today, these opportunities have been largely lost: church buildings have been seized, property looted, and church leaders subjected to constant pressure. Bans and regulatory restrictions have made organized ministry for children virtually impossible. Instead, children are actively, and in some cases forcibly, drawn into camps and so-called "patriotic education" programs, where hostility toward everything Ukrainian is cultivated, including the faith and religious practices familiar to them from their own churches (OI-47, 61).

The combination of Orthodox rhetoric, "traditional values," and military training in Russian-run camps makes participation particularly difficult for Protestant and Muslim children from occupied territories. In personal interviews, parents report being pressured to send their children to such camps under the threat of being labeled "unreliable." Local collaborators are aware of families that were active church members before the war and deliberately focus on "exposing" their alleged disloyalty by exerting pressure through their children (OI-29, 38, 47).

Children of believers in the occupied territories experience a dual form of harm: "patriotic–militarized" upbringing is imposed alongside the systematic dismantling of the religious life of their communities. Harsh and sustained repression of clergy and congregations of the Orthodox Church of Ukraine, the Greek Catholic Church, and Protestant churches deprives believing children of any lawful space for spiritual education and formation, forcing them to grow up in an atmosphere of fear and coercion.

Russian legislation criminalizes religious practice and missionary activity. This affects not only religious communities as such, but has particularly severe consequences for families of believers. Rules imposed by the occupation authorities penalize prayer or preaching outside "authorized" venues; closures, raids, and fines for "illegal missionary activity" are widely documented. Jehovah's Witnesses and other religious communities that existed prior to the occupation have been labeled "extremist," leading to criminal convictions of parishioners simply for practicing their faith. For children of believers, this creates a reality in which their parents' faith can trigger persecution, while schools simultaneously impose militarized narratives of loyalty to the occupying state (Amnesty).

International humanitarian law limits the authority of an occupying power to alter school curricula and the language of instruction and explicitly prohibits the militarization of children. Russia, however, systematically violates these norms. In temporarily occupied territories, a new subject titled "Fundamentals of Security and Family Protection" has been introduced for grades 8–10, while younger children are required to learn poems about the so-called "special military operation" that glorify the occupying forces. This reflects a continuation of policies aimed at erasing Ukrainian identity, imposing "re-education," and militarizing children—practices Russia

has pursued in Crimea and the Donbas since 2014. The evidence indicates that the Kremlin is deliberately shaping a generation of Ukrainian children marked by hostility and readiness for violence toward everything perceived as non-Russian, including Ukrainian history and culture, as well as people who relocated to territory controlled by Ukraine.

- **Crimea: cadet classes, "Yunarmiya," and military modules in higher education (2024).** The Crimean Tatar Resource Center documents the systematic militarization of children in occupied Crimea in 2024, including mandatory "patriotic" events, letters of support for Russian soldiers, the expansion of cadet classes, militarized camp programs, and a compulsory military module at the Crimean Federal University. According to their estimates, approximately 45,000 children have been enrolled in "Yunarmiya" and other militarized structures (ctrcenter.org).

- **Zaporizhzhia region: firearms training for children under the supervision of Russian military personnel (2024).** Ukraine's Human Rights Commissioner, Dmytro Lubinets, reported that in the temporarily occupied areas of the Zaporizhzhia region, Russian forces organized "training" for children that included weapons handling, live-fire exercises from various positions, and marching in military uniforms under Russian flags. Children are being drawn into so-called "patriotic" movements such as "Yunarmiya" and cadet classes, which constitutes a grave violation of children's rights (united24media.com).

- **Donetsk region: the "Yunarmiya" network and the training of future fighters (2019–2025; investigation done in 2025).** Ukrainian law enforcement agencies and the Office of the Prosecutor General uncovered the "Yunarmiya" structure operating in the occupied part of the Donetsk region. According to the investigation, more than 6,000 Ukrainian children passed through the local branch of the movement between 2019 and 2025. They were trained in drill, weapons handling, and basic combat tactics and subjected to systematic ideological indoctrination aimed at their eventual recruitment into Russian armed units. One former "graduate" of the program was killed in combat in June 2024 (united24media.com).

- **Luhansk region: "Sports Day" used as a cover for combat training (2025).** In the village of Stanytsia Luhanska, according to the National Resistance Center of Ukraine, Russia's National Guard (Rosgvardiya) and activists of the ruling United Russia party organized "training sessions" for children from the local football club Ataman under the guise of celebrating National Sports Day. The children were required to perform physical drills, practice hand-to-hand combat techniques, and rehearse special-forces maneuvers. Instructors reportedly stated openly that the activities were intended as preparation for future selection into military units (united24media.com).

The system of militarization is large-scale and highly organized. According to an investigation, Russia uses a network of more than 200 facilities, including camps, schools, and military bases, located both within Russia and in occupied territories to carry out the "re-education," Russification, and militarization of Ukrainian children. Children are enrolled in programs with an explicit military component. The investigation documents drill and combat training, airborne training, live combat exercises, and even classes on assembling drones for the Russian armed forces. Militarization extends to very young children as well: at least 39 facilities have been identified where children as young as eight receive weapons training, participate in "grenade-throwing competitions," and take courses in tactical combat medicine. In total, at least 130 locations are involved in this form of military training and ideological indoctrination (The Guardian).

In its Seventh Interim Report (15 July 2025), OSCE/ODIHR documents a growing number of cadet classes in occupied territories, pressure on parents to enroll their children in militarized organizations, and the introduction of military components into school curricula. These practices are assessed as violations of international humanitarian law governing education and as unacceptable political and military indoctrination of children (osce.org).

Adolescents who have managed to return to Ukrainian-controlled territory consistently describe intense ideological pressure, intimidation, attempts to break their identity, and systematic militarization during their time under occupation.

- **"Ivanka,"** 18 (name changed). While returning to Ukraine, she was subjected to intensified questioning by the FSB at the border after officers found the phrase "Glory to Ukraine" on her phone. She was forced to memorize and sing the Russian national anthem while standing under the scorching sun (Українська Правда).
- **Vladyslav Rudenko**, 16 (Kherson region). Russian soldiers took him from his home, gave him 30 minutes to pack, and transported him to Crimea. At a so-called "center," he was told to "get rid of everything Ukrainian." He describes militarized schooling and systematic ideological indoctrination (RadioFreeEurope/RadioLiberty).
- **Taras**, 17 (name withheld). After returning to Ukrainian-controlled territory, it was reported that he had been subjected to propaganda and forcibly involved in military training. He was taught to throw grenades, disassemble weapons, and undergo training in simulated "trench" conditions (Українська Правда).
- **Alina Kovalova**, 15 (Kherson region). She was intimidated with claims that "Ukrainians will come and kill" those who had any contact with Russians. After being taken to Russia, she was enrolled in a Russian school. Her testimony describes mechanisms of Russification and the erosion of Ukrainian identity (svidomi.in.ua).
- **Kyrylo,** 11, and **Arsen**, 9. After returning to Ukraine, the boys reported that their school forced them several times a week to attend propaganda classes titled *"Conversations About What Matters."* Their parents were also pressured to donate money "for the needs of the Russian army." When the family refused, a teacher began bullying the children and threatening their removal from the family (life).

Conclusions

1. **Deportation, Russification, and militarization are parts of a single occupation policy targeting children.** Through education systems and camp networks, these practices pose a long-term threat to Ukrainian identity and security both in the occupied territories and inside the Russian Federation.
2. **Children of believers face a double burden. Their religious communities are dismantled, while a state-imposed pseudo-religious ideology is introduced in their place.** The rhetoric of "traditional values," tied to enforced loyalty and military training, is particularly damaging for Protestants, Muslims, and other religious minorities.
3. **Control is exercised through pressure on parents and communities and through forced displays of loyalty.** Refusal to participate in so-called "patriotic" programs is labeled as disloyalty and may result in harassment, fines, or threats of child removal.
4. **Testimonies from returned teenagers confirm the systematic nature of intimidation and ideological indoctrination.** Forced symbolic acts of loyalty described by children are consistent with OSCE/ODIHR findings and investigative reporting on networks of camps and cadet programs.
5. **Effective response requires a coordinated effort by the state and international partners.** This includes systematic documentation, legal qualification of violations, sustained international pressure, and reintegration programs for affected children—providing psychosocial care, spiritual support, and protection of religious freedom in de-occupied areas.

8. MEDIA AS A TOOL OF RELIGIOUS REPRESSION AND THE EXPORT OF RUSSIA'S REPRESSIVE MODEL ABROAD

Since 2014, and especially after 2022, the Russian authorities have systematically dismantled or "Russified" Ukrainian media in the occupied territories. Research by the Ukrainian Institute of Mass Information shows that within two years of occupation, at least around 300 editorial offices in the Zaporizhzhia, Kherson, and Luhansk regions were destroyed, seized, or taken over and subordinated to Russian control (imi.org).

Russian state structures have replaced local broadcasting infrastructure, blocked Ukrainian television channels and online media, and imposed Russian satellite systems and channel packages on residents. This has created a kind of digital isolation, leaving local populations highly vulnerable to propaganda and disinformation (kyivindependent).

Monitoring by Forum 18 identifies the spread of disinformation targeting religious communities and believers as one of the core violations of freedom of religion in the occupied territories, alongside abductions, torture, killings, and the mass closure of religious communities (forum18).

The Russian propaganda machine in the temporarily occupied territories of Ukraine systematically portrays certain churches as "wrong" or "hostile," framing them as threats to security and to so-called "traditional values." In news reports and official messaging, religious communities, especially Protestant churches, Muslim groups, and other minorities, are labeled as "sects," "pseudo-religious cults," "Western agents," or "extremists." This language serves to legitimize administrative pressure, forced closures, property seizures, and the broader criminalization of religious life (vesti.ru).

Key propaganda narratives (common framing):

- Replacing freedom of religion with "countering threats": religious communities are portrayed as "centers of sabotage," "intelligence-gathering networks," or "tools of Western influence" (vesti.ru).
- Stigmatization through the "sect" label: any religious presence that is not affiliated with the Russian Orthodox Church or considered "canonical" is described as a "pseudo-religion," "fraud," or "brainwashing" (vesti.ru).
- Shifting blame onto churches: religious communities are accused of political or military activities, such as organizing protests, inciting "mass unrest," or "coordinating strikes," which is then used to justify repression (vesti.ru).

Religious repression in the occupied territories is accompanied by a distinct media framing.

- In Mariupol, confiscated Protestant churches are being used by Russian forces as barracks or storage facilities, or repurposed for other uses. One such church was converted into the "Komsomolets" cinema. Occupation media portray this as a "new life" for the building, omitting the fact that it was a house of prayer taken from a religious community (globalchristianrelief; forum18).
- In Melitopol, the occupation authorities shut down the city's largest evangelical churches ("Melitopol Christian Church," "Word of Life," and "Grace"), declaring them "extremist" and allegedly linked to foreign intelligence services. Their buildings were confiscated. Yevhen Balytskyi, head of the occupation administration of the Zaporizhzhia region, publicly spoke of "cleansing" the religious sphere, using phrases such as "the activities of religious sects have been terminated," accompanied by lists of targeted groups. This illustrates a pattern of administrative stigmatization, in which legal assessment is replaced by propagandistic labeling (Telegram; forum18).
- Interview with the Russian propaganda outlet "Ukraina.ru." Artem Sharlai, head of the so-called "department for relations with religious organizations" of the Zaporizhzhia occupation administration, claims that the "core of anti-Russian protests" in Melitopol consisted of "followers of a number of neo-charismatic sects," asserting that these "sectarians formed the core and organizing force" behind protest actions (ukraina.ru).
- In the same interview, Sharlay claims that the neo-charismatic organization "Bethel" in Berdiansk allegedly stored "large quantities of ammunition and explosives," and that "mines and ammunition" were found at a monastery of the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church in Berdiansk. Following these allegations, the organizations are described as "instruments of Catholic expansion" (ukraina.ru). In this way, Protestant and Greek Catholic communities in the occupied territories are publicly labeled as potential "sabotage centers," a designation used to justify their closure and the persecution of believers (ecoi.net).

- Olga Skabeyeva (Russian state television): in a televised media product (program teaser/description), the phrase "they are planning to turn the country into an American sect" is used in reference to Ukraine in a religious context. This is a telling example of discrediting religious pluralism and pushing the idea that religion is a tool of foreign control (smotrim.ru).

- Vladimir Solovyov (Russian propaganda media): within pro-Kremlin propaganda, a religiously charged demonization of Ukraine is systematically promoted through the language of "Satanism" and "de-Satanization." This framing shifts the war into the realm of a so-called "sacred confrontation" and fuels intolerance toward churches and Christian denominations that are labeled as "non-traditional" or "different" (Telegram).

International reports (Forum 18, USCIRF, and other religious freedom monitoring organizations) emphasize that repression of religious communities under occupation is accompanied by systematic disinformation and propaganda aimed at justifying violence and portraying victims as "agents of Kyiv," "sect members," or "terrorists" (forum18).

As a result, this kind of rhetoric functions as a "social marker of disloyalty" for entire communities and families. People may be officially recorded as "sect members" or "extremists," subjected to pressure during inspections, or threatened with consequences for their children. In this way, a propaganda label becomes a practical tool of repressive administrative behavior (Mission Eurasia).

Based on its long-term monitoring of religious freedom in Russia, Mission Eurasia states with deep concern that, after developing a standard "pathway" of repression in Crimea and the Donbas since 2014—media demonization administrative charges criminal prosecution and imprisonment or forced emigration—the Russian authorities have now applied this same model within Russia itself.

Under this model, state-controlled media first create an image of certain groups as "dangerous"—including Ukrainian churches, Crimean Tatar Muslims, Protestants, and anti-war activists. branding them as "extremists," "sect members," or "agents of the enemy" (osce; docs.un). This narrative is then used to introduce and aggressively enforce laws on "extremism" and "illegal missionary activity" (Article 5.26 of the Russian Code of Administrative Offenses; Articles 282.2, 239, and 205.5 of the Russian Criminal Code (venice.coe.int; hudoc.echr.coe.int). After that, security forces carry out mass raids, impose fines, conduct interrogations, seize buildings, open criminal cases, and issue prison sentences (uscirf.gov).

The same model was used in Russia after media campaigns of vilification, when Jehovah's Witnesses were declared "extremists." Later, "anti-war" religious leaders were targeted, followed by unregistered Baptist congregations (uscirf.gov).

Monitoring of the situation in Ukrainian territories occupied since 2022 leads to a tragic conclusion: Russia has not only transferred these already-tested methods of religious terror to those areas, but has significantly raised the stakes. Now even the killing of dissenting or "undesirable" clergy can be justified as a "necessity of wartime."

In this repressive system, Russian media do not merely provide background coverage. They function as the starting point and an ongoing tool for legitimizing and normalizing religious repression.

Conclusions:

1. **Monopolization of the media environment and the destruction of independent journalism.** The systematic elimination of independent news outlets, the introduction of censorship rules, and the use of technical blocking have created an information environment in which the propaganda narrative about religion and "security" faces almost no alternatives.

2. **Media construction of an "internal enemy" out of religious minorities.** Through language that labels groups as "sects," "extremists," "foreign agents," "Satanists," and "schismatics," Protestants, Muslims, Jehovah's Witnesses, and independent Orthodox communities are systematically stigmatized. This prepares the public to accept bans, fines, criminal cases, and the confiscation of property.

3. **The merging of "Orthodox" propaganda with the ideology of the "Russian World" and wartime rhetoric.** State and church media portray the war against Ukraine as a defense of "Orthodox civilization" and "traditional values," turning repression against "outsider" communities into something presented as spiritually justified and morally necessary.

4. **Media campaigns to discredit religious leaders as a step toward repression.** Talk shows and news reports that smear Jehovah's Witnesses, Protestant rehabilitation centers, and anti-war clergy create the image of the "bad pastor or priest." This lowers public sympathy and helps legitimize criminal sentences, defrocking, and forced exile.

5. **The well-established chain of "propaganda—law—force," developed in the Donbas and Crimea, has been brought inside Russia and turned into an exportable model.** In the occupied territories, media demonization of Ukrainian churches, Crimean Tatar Muslims, and Protestants consistently came before the use of "anti-missionary" and "anti-extremism" laws. The same pattern was later applied across Russia as a whole, and eventually began to influence other authoritarian regimes.

6. **The export of Russia's religiously charged narratives undermines international solidarity with victims of repression.** Through outlets such as RT and Sputnik, as well as like-minded conservative media in the West, myths about the "persecution of Orthodox Christians in Ukraine" and Russia's supposed role in "defending Christianity" are widely promoted. This masks Russia's real crimes against religious communities and makes it harder to build an effective international human-rights response.

9. RECOMMENDATIONS

For many years, the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom has recommended designating the Russian Federation as a Country of Particular Concern due to systematic and serious violations of freedom of religion or belief. Recent developments only strengthen this assessment. These include the growing number of criminal and administrative cases, increasingly severe sentences under "extremism" and "discrediting the army" laws, and the direct linkage between religious policy and Russia's war against Ukraine (USCIRF).

Recent assessments by international human rights organizations and research institutions, including Human Rights Watch, the McCain Institute, and Catholic and Protestant monitoring bodies, classify Russia among countries with severe or extremely severe violations of religious freedom, alongside Iran, China, and several Middle Eastern authoritarian regimes (Human Rights Watch).

It is especially concerning that Russia's model of strict state control over the religious sphere is becoming attractive to other countries. This includes bans on the activities of Jehovah's Witnesses, the adoption of laws that make it more difficult to register religious communities, and a broader "inspiration" that authoritarian regimes are drawing from Russia's experience in "putting religion in order." A 2024 report by Mission Eurasia shows how the authorities in Belarus are, in many ways, replicating the religiously repressive practices of their eastern neighbor (missioneurasia_Belarus).

The nature and concrete examples of this export of repression are described in greater detail in the Mission Eurasia Religious Freedom Initiative report on the state of religious freedom in Russia https://missioneurasia.org/religious-freedom/.

Based on the findings of this report and the documented cases of religious persecution, and taking into account the roles of all actors involved, the following recommendations are proposed:

1. For the United Nations, the European Union, the OSCE, USCIRF, and other intergovernmental institutions:

a. Treat the link between repression and propaganda as a single, unified phenomenon.
- In resolutions and reports on religious freedom concerning Russia and the occupied territories of Ukraine, explicitly address the role of state-controlled media and the concept of "spiritual security" as tools used to prepare for and justify persecution.

– Include this issue within the mandates of special rapporteurs (freedom of religion or belief, freedom of expression, and the human-rights situation in Russia).

b. Strengthen monitoring of the occupied territories as "zones of experimental repression."

– Establish a permanent mechanism to document violations of religious freedom in Crimea, the so-called "Donetsk People's Republic" (DNR) and "Luhansk People's Republic" (LNR), and the occupied parts of Zaporizhzhia, Kherson, and other regions.

– Track separately how practices tested there, such as fines for missionary activity, the closure of religious communities, and the confiscation of buildings, are later transferred into Russia itself.

c. Use religious freedom as a criterion for sanctions and diplomatic pressure.

– Link targeted personal sanctions to the involvement of officials, security personnel, and media managers in the persecution of Jehovah's Witnesses, Muslims, and Protestants, as well as to their role in media-driven hate campaigns.

– Make any easing of pressure conditional on clear, verifiable steps, including lifting bans, reviewing so-called "extremism" and "missionary" cases, allowing independent monitoring, and returning confiscated buildings and property.

d. Establish rapid protection and relocation pathways for religious leaders.

– Create dedicated visa and humanitarian programs for clergy and religious leaders facing persecution in Russia and the occupied territories.

– Provide support through research, teaching, and educational grants for those forced to continue their ministry within diaspora communities.

2. For international judicial bodies (including the International Criminal Court, mechanisms of universal jurisdiction, special tribunals, and similar bodies):

a. Treat religious persecution as a potential crime against humanity.

– Include patterns of systematic persecution on religious grounds in investigations, including cases involving Jehovah's Witnesses, unregistered religious groups, Muslim communities, and Ukrainian churches in the occupied territories.

– Assess state-controlled media campaigns and propaganda as part of the broader context of religious repression, including incitement and the promotion of hatred.

b. Prioritize cases related to the occupied territories of Ukraine.

– Document abductions, torture, killings of clergy, confiscation of religious buildings, and the forced closure of religious communities, particularly in Crimea and in southern and eastern Ukraine.

– Examine how these acts are linked to military occupation and to the deliberate reshaping of the demographic and confessional landscape.

c. Collect and preserve digital evidence of propaganda.

– Archive television broadcasts, talk shows, and online content containing direct or indirect calls to violence, dehumanization of Ukrainians, Muslims, and religious minorities labeled as "sects."

– Use such materials as evidence of intent and contextual background in future cases against specific officials, propagandists, and media executives.

d. Develop legal standards addressing the abuse of "extremism" and "foreign agent" laws.

– In court rulings (at both the national and international levels), explicitly recognize the arbitrary application of anti-extremism laws and the "foreign agent" designation to religious activity as violations of the right to freedom of religion and freedom of association.

– Establish legal precedents in cases involving coercive registration requirements and the banning of unregistered religious communities.

3. For non-governmental human rights organizations:

a. Build sustainable documentation networks in partnership with religious communities.
- Help Orthodox Christians, Protestants, Jehovah's Witnesses, Muslims, Catholics, and others safely document cases of raids, fines, criminal charges, and the confiscation of buildings.
- Develop secure, anonymous communication channels (encryption, secure messaging platforms) to collect testimonies from inside Russia and from the occupied territories.

b. Prepare "shadow reports" for international institutions (the UN, OSCE, USCIRF, the EU).
- Organize cases by category, including "missionary activity," "extremism," "foreign agent" designations, refusal of military service, and cases from the occupied territories.
- Explicitly highlight the role of state-controlled media and local propaganda in triggering and justifying religious repression.

c. Provide targeted support to persecuted religious leaders and communities.
- Offer legal assistance, including access to lawyers and the submission of complaints to international bodies.
- Provide psychological and spiritual support to those who have experienced arrest, torture, abuse, or deportation, as well as to their families.
- Assist with relocation, refugee status applications, and access to humanitarian visas.

d. Integrate religious freedom into the broader human-rights agenda.
- Show that cases involving missionary activity, "extremism," and "foreign agent" laws are part of a wider assault on civil society, freedom of expression, and the freedom to organize.
- Coordinate efforts with media freedom, anti-corruption, and anti-war initiatives.

4. For major information companies and digital platforms (Meta, Google, YouTube, X, Telegram, and others):

a. Strictly limit the reach and monetization of Russian state propaganda channels.
- Apply reduced distribution, clear "state-affiliated media" labeling, and bans on advertising and monetization for accounts affiliated with Kremlin-controlled media outlets.
- Respond promptly to content that incites hatred against religious groups or Ukrainians under the pretext of "combating sects" or "fighting satanism."

b. Strengthen protection for users in the Russian Federation and occupied territories.
- Ensure access to censorship-circumvention tools, including mirror services, lightweight applications, and proxy modes.
- Integrate accessible anonymization features and protections against doxing for religious activists and independent clergy.

c. Provide data access for researchers and human rights organizations.
- Share anonymized data on the distribution networks of Russian propaganda, particularly within religious and conservative communities abroad.
- Support independent research on the impact of Kremlin-linked content on perceptions of the war and freedom of religion in the United States, the European Union, Africa, and Latin America.

d. Promote high-quality content on freedom of religion and the war.
- In Russian- and Ukrainian-language segments, algorithmically support the visibility of verified sources documenting religious persecution and conditions under occupation.
- Establish partnerships with human rights organizations and faith-based media to develop educational materials **that strengthen resilience to propaganda and disinformation.**

5. For global religious bodies and faith-based associations:

a. Take a clear public stance against the criminalization of faith and the concept of "holy war."
- Adopt official statements condemning the use of religion to justify aggression and repression, including rhetoric such as "desatanization," "holy war," and similar narratives.
- Emphasize that persecution of believers is unacceptable regardless of denomination or political context.

b. Support persecuted church leaders and religious communities.
- Establish solidarity programs, including scholarships, temporary pastoral positions for deported religious leaders, and "communities in exile."
- Provide financial and organizational assistance to the families of imprisoned pastors, priests, and imams.

c. Reassess relationships with Russian religious structures that support repression and war.
- Raise the status and role of representatives of the Russian Orthodox Church and other affiliated bodies within ecumenical councils and interchurch associations when those structures legitimize aggression.
- Until there is a public rejection of war propaganda, temporarily limit their participation in governing bodies, joint declarations, and formal dialogue.

d. Use moral authority to advocate at the level of governments and international institutions.
- Organize joint visits by church and denominational leaders to the United Nations, the European Union, and national parliaments to address religious persecution in the Russian Federation and in Ukraine's occupied territories.
- Hold global days of prayer and public awareness dedicated to persecuted religious communities in Russia and in occupied areas.

6. For humanitarian organizations:

a. Integrate religious freedom into needs assessments.
- When working with refugees, internally displaced persons, and other vulnerable groups in Ukraine, the Russian Federation, and host countries, include questions about religious affiliation and possible persecution on religious grounds.
- Document cases in which people fled their homes due to pressure on their religious community, pastor, mosque, or church.

b. Train staff to recognize religiously motivated persecution.
- Include training modules on how religious persecution manifests, how it differs from everyday discrimination, and how to ask sensitive questions safely and ethically.
- Establish cooperation with specialized human rights and religious freedom organizations to refer and manage complex cases.

c. Provide neutral but sensitive assistance.
- Ensure that aid is not tied to religious affiliation, while taking into account the specific needs of religious minorities (dietary requirements, religious practices, access to safe spaces for prayer).
- In camps, shelters, and reception centers, monitor whether particular groups of believers are exposed to secondary pressure, harassment, or exclusion.

d. Use field access for documentation and advocacy.
- With informed consent, share anonymized information on religious persecution with human rights organizations and international monitoring bodies.
- In public communication, highlight that the humanitarian consequences of war and repression also have a religious dimension, affecting Ukrainians, Russians, Crimean Tatars, Protestants, Muslims, and others.

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