

Working Session 6

Charitable Foundation "Veresk"

Canonical Status of the Orthodox Community of Abkhazia and Restoration of an Independent Church of Abkhazia.

Ladies and Gentlemen!

As we have so little time, I will try to do my best to describe shortly what the Abkhaz society is facing in regard with the canonical status of the Orthodox Church of Abkhazia. The situation is critic and remains thus 20 years despite all this time only the Russian church has delivered assistance. The complexity and sensitivity of the issue is certain and worrying: the Abkhaz Orthodox church after the Abkhaz- Georgian war continues to be in a legal vacuum. In these circumstances it is difficult to speak of a canonically - functioning institution of the church, thus is the diocese without the bishop, and it is evident that major part of the Abkhaz people, which is Orthodox Christian, needs assistance to solve the problem of the church. In May 2011 the ecclesiastical essembly created the Abkhaz Holy Metropolia in New Athos in Abkhazia. The essembly was convened by young Abkhaz priests at the New Athos Monastery cathedral. This is the first time since the years of Soviet era that such an event took place in the modern history of the Orthodoxy in Abkhazia in which the question of the restoration of the Abkhaz church was raised.

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The truth is that the restoration of the independence of the Abkhaz Church is necessary for a full-fledged life of this important institution, as well as the revival of Orthodoxy and enhancing spirituality of our people, is in the interests of our society. Restoring of the independence of the Abkhaz Church will create such conditions that no one will be able to settle down any sect and extremist religious groups. Great importance lies in the restoration of the Abkhaz Orthodox Church for recovery of moral and spiritual state of our society.

Abkhazia adopted Christianity in the 4th century and it had deep roots starting from the construction of the Abkhaz statehood in ancient times. I will not go in describing all historic facts in details, but I have to mention the fact that in 1943 the Russian Orthodox Church, with the intrusion of Soviet power and a dictator Stalin personally, the first among the Orthodox Churches recognized the independence of the Georgian Church. In 1990 the Ecumenical Patriarchate did not take into account all political circumstances of the past and present and granted autocephaly and patriarchal status to the Georgian Orthodox Church in the canonical borders identified in 1943 between the Georgian and Russian Orthodox Churches within the Soviet borders of the Georgian Soviet Socialist Republic. The relationship between the people of Abkhazia and the Georgian Church cannot be called friendly and fraternal. This is confirmed by the fact that during the period from 1918 to the present time, the Georgian Church has always supported nationalistic policy of Georgian authorities in regard of Abkhazians and other nations. The Georgian Patriarchate has never stood for ending bloody wars that took place in 1992-1993 and in 2008. Orthodox multiethnic people of Abkhazia have never felt the pastoral support of Georgia and of the Georgian Orthodox Church hierarchs. Rather than condemnation of military action, the Georgian Church has always stressed the importance of restoring political borders of Georgia, thus justifying the chauvinistic policy of their state. Georgian Patriarch Iliya the 2nd is acting like a politician, only in the interests of Georgia. For example, during the recent

inter-ethnic conflict, the Georgian Patriarch said not a word to stop the bloodshed and the war. In 2008, when Georgian troops shot civilians and Russian peacekeepers in South Ossetia, Patriarch Ilia 2nd did not utter anything to stop this inhuman perfidy. Everybody remembers both in Abkhazia and South Ossetia about the «Extraordinary order of the Catholicos-Patriarch of All Georgia Ilia II», published in the Tbilisi newspaper "Zaria Vostoka", 30 October 1990, and two days earlier read out at Zion Cathedral after the church service:

"In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit command - wrote Ilia II, - now everyone who kills a Georgian, is declared an enemy of the Georgian people. Bring the name and the name of the killer in a special book of the Patriarchate and pass on from generation to generation as shameful and subject to condemnation. "

After this xenophobic decree of the Georgian Catholicos of Georgia, a wave of murders of the Ossetian population. Several thousand Ossetians in the early 90s were brutally murdered and missing. These crimes are not only not gone unnoticed by the Georgian spiritual leader, they are greatly encouraged his taciturn "blessing."

Natural reaction to such an attitude is that, the Orthodox community and the people of Abkhazia do not recognize the authority of the Georgian Orthodox Church and appealed to the autocephalous Orthodox Churches against the jurisdiction of the Georgian Orthodox Church on the territory of the Republic of Abkhazia. On this occasion, a poll of the population of Abkhazia was conducted, in which more than 70,000 people signed up to the issue of parting from the canonical jurisdiction of the Georgian Orthodox Church and Restoration of the Church of Abkhazia.

