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Appeal to the Evangelical Churches of Ukraine

Participants of the Roundtable Maidan and Church: Mission and Social Responsibility of Christians

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Resolution of the roundtable “Maidan and Church: Mission and Social Responsibility of Christians” held in Kyiv on January 17, 2014

APPEAL TO THE EVANGELICAL CHURCHES OF UKRAINE

In this crucial moment for Ukraine we, the participants of the round table “Maidan and the Church: Mission and Social Responsibility of Christians” held in Kyiv on 17 January 2014, appeal to the leaders of Evangelical churches, fellowships, denominations, ministries, and organizations, as well as to church members – to take all possible measures to stand for truth, peace and justice in Ukraine.

Regardless of political preferences we call our brothers and sisters all over the country to take more active part in the life of the Ukrainian society and demonstrate a high level of personal responsibility. First of all, we all should strengthen our prayer: “I will therefore that men pray everywhere, lifting up holy hands, without wrath and doubting” (1 Tim. 2:1-4, 8). As “faith without works is dead” (James 2:17, 20, 26), we have to provide practical help to the victims of violence, following the example of the good Samaritan (Luke 10:29-37) and our Lord Jesus Christ, in the context of the recent repressions against the Maydan activists, threats to the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church, adoption of anti-constitutional laws on January 16, terror and use of force against the protestors on January 19, 2014, continuing till now.

The Church wisely avoided political speculations on the association agreement with the European Union. However, after the bloodshed at Maydan on 30 November 2013 there is no way the Church could keep silent. Realizing moral responsibility before God and society Christians have to condemn the violence against the civilians, call it a crime publicly, expose the perpetrators and help the victims.

The Maydan Independence Square in Kyiv, as well as little maydans all across the country, are the place for a legitimate right of the people to demand from the government respect for their freedom, dignity and rights, as well as to require the officials to fulfill their obligations for the common good, and not abuse the power given by the Ukrainian people. The Church has to say its authoritative word along with the voice of the people, declaring that they are created by God in His image and likeness, that all people are equal before God, that God’s judgment is real, as well as God’s care for the helpless.

We draw attention of the government and protesters to God’s commandments, love and forgiveness, without which the demand for equality may end with chaos and violence. Therefore we encourage everyone to do their best for a peaceful resolution of the conflict. Each person will give personal account for his or her actions both on earth and in heaven.

We declare that the government’s attempts to isolate the Ukrainian Evangelical believers from the European and international community of Christians are unacceptable.

We confirm that the main task of the Church at this time is to be “salt” and “light” to our society. This means that the Church has to expose sin in all its forms and manifestations directly without any compromise, call the officials and civil society to repentance, show people the true way of salvation in Jesus Christ, help the victims in every way, and give hope.

We believe that by the mercy of God, prayers and labor of Christians the events taking place on Maydan will bring forth spiritual awakening and renewal of the Ukrainian nation.

What Will the Church Say to Maydan

Maydan has challenged not only the government but the Church, too. Searching for answers, people are turning to the Church, but so far it hasn't been able to give a clear reply. The society is trying to understand: is there a limit for tolerance when human rights and freedoms are brutally violated by the president and parliament's majority? How should we demand justice? How should society react to the sudden threat of dictatorship arising after more than 20 years of independence? How should we protect our lives and future of our children in view of the current political situation in the Ukraine?

The roundtable “Maidan and the Church: Mission and Social Responsibility of Christians” took place in Kyiv on Friday, January 17, 2014. The event was initiated by the young leaders of Evangelical churches of Ukraine. Christian Students Fellowship (known as CCX in Ukraine, which is a part of IEFS, a global Christian students' movement) jointly with the Spiritual Renewal Association and the MaidanPrayer.org project helped to implement the initiative.

More than a hundred people showed up, and since that time their feedback has been resonating in social media. The discussion was led by the following three groups of speakers: 1) church ministers and missiologists; 2) theologians and scholars, 3) experts and public figures. They represented the Baptist, Pentecostal, Free Evangelical, Lutheran and Reformed churches of Ukraine.

All the speakers raised a serious concern about the violence demonstrated regularly by the Ukrainian government within the last two months (all churches condemned the violent use of force by the riot police on November 30, 2013, against the students who stood up peacefully for their rights on Maidan.) The participants also condemned the Ministry of Culture of Ukraine for its illegal threats to the Greek Catholic Church. Finally, they disapproved the adoption of the anti-constitutional laws (already named “Black Thursday” by the Ukrainian people) issued on January 16, 2014. As a result, the legitimacy of the whole government has become questionable, while rights for peaceful protest – banned.

Nevertheless, according to the opinions, the unprecedented crisis will purify both church and society. “A final ‘desovietization’ of our post-USSR society and the birth of a new generation of leaders is taking place,” said pastor Oleg Magdych, Maydan activist.

The leaders of the Evangelical community declared their readiness to continue Christian ministry

even under the new wave of repression or restrictions against religious freedom. “The January laws signed by the president threaten not only our society but Christian organizations, too. We shouldn’t be afraid, and continue our ministry instead”, said Denis Gorenkov, CCX director.

Dr. Mykhailo Cherenkov added: “It’s the Church which is the strongest factor in our civil society today, therefore our responsibility has grown.” “The barricades of Maydan touched my heart. I saw the birth of a new nation there. People were ready to fight for their freedom and give their lives for the sake of others,” shared Dr. Sergiy Tymchenko, and his testimony impressed many people in the room. Oles Dmytrenko, author of the book “Corruption: a Bone in the Throat”, reminded the Church about its role of being “salt and light” to the world, that is, condemning sin plainly in any political context and giving a clear moral verdict on what’s truly happening to the society; at the same time – giving hope and showing the true way of salvation.

The initiative was supported by the following leaders of churches and denominations: Anatoly Kalyuzhniy (Union of Independent Evangelical Churches of Ukraine), Valery Antonyuk (Union of Baptist Churches of Ukraine), Ralph Huska (German Evangelical Lutheran Church of Ukraine), as well as by other pastors of Kyiv churches: Petro Marchenko, Mykola Ponomarev, Sergiy Tymchenko, Denis Kondyuk, Olexiy Satenko. Theologians and seminary professors made their authoritative contribution to the discussion, too; they were Petro Kovaliv, father Yuriy Chornomorets, and father Petro Balog. Respected experts and public figures – Sergiy Hula, Andrew Shekhovtsov and Oles Dmytrenko – said their word, too. Guests came not only from the capital of Ukraine, but from all over Ukraine: Kharkiv, Sumy, Dnipropetrovsk, Donetsk, Lviv and other places.

At the end, the moderator Andriy Shekhovtsov, the Maydan prayer tent ministry’s coordinator, encouraged the Evangelical Christians to become more active in their mission and support the peaceful protesters by prayer, witnessing, and practical help.

As the result, the Appeal to the Evangelical Churches of Ukraine is being made with the purpose to lay a strong Biblical foundation for Christians to be more effective in their mission to reach out to the society at such a critical historical time for the Ukrainian nation.

(Minor stylistic editorial corrections were made by the editor.)