**TESTIMONY OF STEVEN MOORE**

**FOUNDER, UKRAINIAN FREEDOM PROJECT**

**BEFORE THE US HELSINKI COMMISSION**

**JULY 24, 2024**

Thank you for the honor of testifying before this Commission today.  I once was chief of staff to a member of House leadership, but this is the first time I’ve been a witness. So, I particularly appreciate the opportunity to be a part of your great work.

As a former staffer, I also want to compliment the knowledge and professionalism of the Commission staff. The work of the Helsinki Commission is respected in Ukraine, in part because of the personal relationships the staff have developed there.

Five days after Russia’s full-scale invasion, I went to Ukraine to try to help Ukrainian friends get to safety and provide humanitarian goods. I created the Ukraine Freedom Project and brought medical supplies to Kyiv when that city was almost surrounded by Russians. We got food to Kharkiv while it was under siege. I was one of the first wave of people at Okhmatdyt children’s hospital earlier this month.  
  
In my 2 ½ years living in Ukraine at war, I have seen and heard many things that nobody should.  Even so, it’s only a fraction of what Ukrainians are going through. Some of the most horrific stories I’ve heard are from Ukrainian Christians who have been tortured by Russians.

Russians occupying Ukrainian territory seek to systematically crush faith. Millions of Christians in occupied Ukraine are worshipping underground, in fear of torture and prison for their beliefs.  
  
Protestants make up less than 4% of Ukraine’s population, but Protestants have borne the worst of the Russian abuse.  
  
To fully understand why, you must understand the role of the Russian Orthodox Church, which is not a church as we would think of one, but a working arm of the Kremlin.  Patriarch Kirill, leader of the Russian Orthodox Church, recently declared a holy war on Ukraine and the West. He promised that Russians who die fighting in Ukraine will have all their sins washed away. He stopped short of offering 72 virgins, but the strategy of creating martyrs is much the same as ISIS.  
  
Russians see Protestants as believers in an American religion, and think they must be agents of America, like Russian Orthodox priests are agents of the Kremlin.

I first became aware of Russian torturing of Ukrainian Christians in 2022, when Viktor Chernaiivsky told me of his torture. Viktor was a pastor in Luhansk and had been evacuating people from occupied areas. Viktor was leaving with a group that included a newborn infant and a pregnant woman when he was pulled over by Russians and “taken to the basement.”

“Taken to the basement” is a euphemism for torture.

Viktor spent 25 days in the basement, including one day when he was tortured with an electrical taser while a Russian Orthodox priest stood over him trying to cast demons out of him for being an evangelical Christian.

Viktor’s story is far from unique.

Only days into the occupation of his city, the Russian FSB came for Oleksandr Salfetnikov, pastor of the Light of the Gospel Baptist Church. The Russians beat him with rubber batons for three days, trying to make him confess to working for the CIA. When they released him, he had to be wheeled out. His assistant pastor did not survive his torture.

We have collected many similar testimonies on our website, [RussiaTorturesChristians.org.](https://russiatortureschristians.org/)

But most Ukrainian Christians can’t speak out. One Ukrainian believer who escaped to Poland told us that after he went public with his torture, a Russian FSB agent in his still-occupied hometown called him and told him what his teenage niece wore to school that day.

Russians are trying to overtly destroy Christianity in Ukraine. In America, Russia’s work to cover it up and spread false narratives to mislead Christians is active and ongoing.

Right here on Capitol Hill, Russian money is behind the effort to persuade members of Congress that the Ukrainian government is persecuting Christians.

The Commission’s excellent work on this subject in 2023 helped the world understand why this is Russian-inspired nonsense. Let me review.

The Ukrainian Orthodox Church, for decades the branch of the Russian Orthodox Church in Ukraine, is home to thousands of clergy who spent much of their lives reporting to Patriarch Kirill in Moscow. About 100 of these clergy are either in prison or on trial for espionage related offenses. This is just scratching the surface of the national security threat. Ukraine Freedom Project polling of Ukrainians shows that hundreds of thousands of people have left the Ukrainian Orthodox Church because they heard their local clergy say things against Ukraine or saw them do things to help the Russian war effort.

Yet a Russian-Ukrainian oligarch who is currently a deacon in the Russian Orthodox Church is paying a team of international lawyers and American lobbyists hundreds of thousands of dollars to spread this false narrative inside Congress and cover up for Russian crimes against Ukrainian Christians.

Prominent members of the media - and even some Members of Congress - continue to tell Americans that the Ukrainian government persecutes Christians.

To understand the extent to which Russian propaganda has penetrated American media, the Ukraine Freedom Project polled Republican primary voters on their attitudes toward Russia.

A quarter of Republican primary voters agreed with the statement Russia is a country that promotes and encourages traditional family values. Russia, the country that tortures Christians. Russia, the country that uses rape as a weapon of war. Russia, the country that brags about kidnapping hundreds of thousands of Ukrainian children… promotes traditional family values.

We polled how they got this information. 25% of all Republican voters believe this narrative. Among those who get their news from Tucker Carlson, 38% believe Russia promotes traditional family values. Among those who get their news from Joe Rogan it is 47%. Perhaps most indicative of the degree to which our adversaries are collaborating, among TikTok users it is 35%.

I thank this Commission for giving me today's opportunity to highlight the stories of so many brave Ukrainians who have suffered for their faith and their country, and to highlight the work of my organization to help Ukrainians and to tell their stories at the hands of the Russians.

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