

17/05/2020

The Episcopal Council of the Serbian Orthodox Church in North, Central and South America expresses concern over the heightened situation in Montenegro



The Episcopal Council of the Serbian Orthodox Church in North, Central and South America has issued a statement regarding the heightened situation in Montenegro. The statement reads:

The Episcopal Council of the Serbian Orthodox Church in North, Central and South America

St. Sava Monastery, Libertyville, Illinois

May 14, 2020

COMMUNIQUE

The Episcopal Council of the Serbian Orthodox Church in North, Central and South

America expresses concern over the heightened situation in Montenegro. The joint struggle against the coronavirus and rejection of all things, which included also the Serbian Orthodox Church in Montenegro, has shown that peace and order can reign in this country. The recent celebration of the feast of St. Vasilije at the Ostrog Monastery, when the prayerful presence of the people was permitted, was a good example of cooperation between the state and the Church.

However, the latest actions of the current state authorities in Montenegro, which arrested His Grace Bishop Joanikije of Budim and Niksic on the evening of May 12, 2020 in Niksic, along with seven of his clergy, confirm the fears that Montenegro is an unfortunate exception in the current worldwide fight against this pandemic, since it was only there that force was used against ones' freedom to confession their faith, which is one of the most important norms of civilization. During the pandemic, Bishop Joanikije showed full understanding and respect for the latest health care measures which are in force not only in Montenegro, but throughout Europe and the civilized world.

We hereby convey the solidarity of the entire Orthodox Church in Americas with those apprehended, His Grace Bishop Joanikije and seven priests, as well as with the faithful in their struggle for basic human and civil rights.

For this reason, the Episcopal Council of the Serbian Orthodox Church in North, Central and South America, condemns the actions of the government, which, under the pretext of its battle with the coronavirus, is repressing its own citizens and the faithful people of the Orthodox Church who recently expressed their dissatisfaction with the adoption of an unjust law.

The Episcopal Council joins the appeal of the Holy Synod of Bishops of the Serbian Orthodox Church, and the Episcopal Council of the Serbian Orthodox Church in Montenegro, as well as many other voices in the world, for the government in Montenegro to stop the persecution of the Church. We call on this government to apply wisdom, preserve sobriety, show prudence, and to cooperate with religious communities for the common good, as democratic governments in the civilized world do, and to immediately release those innocent, Bishop Joanikije and the

clergy.

Due to the aforementioned, the Episcopal Council has addressed the governments of the countries in which they reside, stressing the anti-democratic behavior of the Montenegrin authorities, which endangers the freedom of the Church, and asks for their support.

Finally, we hope that the Montenegrin authorities, as well as the Orthodox people there, will act peacefully and responsibly and will not respond to provocations.

We pray to the Risen Lord that reconciliation and harmony among the people will prevail in Montenegro.

The Episcopal Council of the Serbian Orthodox Church in North, Central and South America