

04/01/2023

ARCHBISHOP ELPIDOPHOROS PROTESTS TO SECRETARY OF STATE ABOUT KOSOVO BAN ON SERBIAN PATRIARCH



In his capacity as Chairman of the Assembly of Canonical Orthodox Bishops of the United States, Archbishop Elpidophoros of the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America sent a letter to the U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken regarding the ban on His Holiness Patriarch Porfirije of the Serbian Church entering Kosovo.

The Pristina authorities announced the ban last week, on the eve of the Serbian primate's planned pastoral visit. His Holiness was then physically stopped at the border and turned away.

As OrthoChristian reported last week, two Serbian hierarchs in America sent letters of protest to local and state officials: His Grace Bishop Longin of New Gračanica and Midwestern America wrote to Senator Dick Durbin (D-IL) and His Grace Bishop Irinej of Eastern America wrote to Sec. of State Blinken.

And according to another report from the Serbian Eastern American Diocese, Abp. Elpidophoros also contacted Blinken, representing the Assembly of Canonical

Bishops.

The diocese writes:

On December 29, 2022, the Chairman of the Assembly of Canonical Orthodox Bishops of the United States, His Eminence Archbishop Elpidophoros of the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America sent a letter to the United States Secretary of State Antony Blinken regarding the ban on entry into Kosovo and Metohija to His Holiness Patriarch Porfirije of the Serbian Orthodox Church.

In his letter, His Eminence expressed solidarity and sincere concerns brought to his attention by the hierarchs of the Serbian Orthodox Church in North, Central, and South America with regard to the current situation developing in Kosovo and Metohija. In particular, His Eminence drew Secretary Blinken's attention to the denial of entry to Kosovo of His Holiness Patriarch Porfirije of the Serbian Orthodox Church on December 26, 2022. Patriarch Porfirije was, thereby, unable to be with the Serbian Orthodox faithful in Kosovo and Metohija in the days leading up to Christ's Nativity.

As a result of the current situation in the region, on behalf of the Assembly of Canonical Orthodox Bishops of the United States, His Eminence called upon the Secretary to continue facilitating peace together with human rights and religious freedoms of the Serbian people in Kosovo and Metohija.

The letter from Archbishop Elpidophoros, together with the Assembly of Canonical Orthodox Bishops of the United States, demonstrates sincere Christian love and unity to the Serbian Patriarch, clergy, monastics, and people of Kosovo and Metohija.

Also read Bp. Irinej's letter to Sec. of State Blinken:



E_No_606
December 26, 2022

The Honorable Antony Blinken
The Secretary of State
United States Department of State
2201 C Street NW
Washington, DC 20520

**RE: RELIGIOUS FREEDOM AND REGIONAL SECURITY IN LIGHT OF PRISTINA
AUTHORITIES BANNING PATRIARCH PORFIRIJE FROM ENTERING KOSOVO AND
ENSUING DEVELOPMENTS**

Dear Mr. Secretary:

I pray that you and your family, as well as your colleagues and coworkers, have truly enjoyed joyous holiday celebrations. As such, I write to you on this day, when we as a nation, one which enjoys religious liberty by respecting the diversity of faiths and peoples, celebrate Christmas together as a Federal Holiday.

By stark contrast, kindly permit me to draw your attention to the ongoing persecution of the Serbian Orthodox Church in Kosovo by the Pristina authorities. As is known to you, on Christmas Day for most of the Christian world, Sunday, December 25, 2022, His Holiness Patriarch Porfirije of the Serbian Orthodox Church received word that he would not be permitted to enter Kosovo in advance of forthcoming Christmas celebrations.

What kind of a message was intended to be sent to the Patriarch by this prohibition, and with what aim in mind? As a leader of an influential Orthodox Church in the region, was he deemed to be a threat to regional security, such that it would override the international cause of religious freedom? Is the Serbian Orthodox Church, with its continuous, centuries' old presence on Kosovo, seen as an element of destabilization?

Thereafter, on this December 26, 2022, His Holiness was physically turned back at the Merdare administrative border crossing with Kosovo. According to information outlets and other sources, following a routine check on the Serbian side of the administrative crossing, Patriarch Porfirije's automobile was pulled over on the Kosovo side. There, following a 40-minute wait, Patriarch Porfirije and his entourage were denied entry into Kosovo.

In his own words, the Head of the Serbian Orthodox Church, who was enroute to his world-old see, The Patriarchate of Pec, aptly describes the situation in which he found himself:

*"As Patriarch, I went to the first and most important seat of my Church.
As a priest, I set out to be with my people on the eve of the most joyful holiday.*

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As a citizen, I went to my house, to my home.

From the moment I set out on this path, I repeat, wherever I was outside of Kosovo and Metohija, I was in a foreign country. I am only at my home in Kosovo and Metohija.

Today the door of my home is locked to me, and I pray to God to unlock the hearts of those who closed them and that the love of Christmas and the birth of the Savior touch the minds and consciences of all people."

https://www.instagram.com/portrie_patrijarh/

To the contrary, barricades have since been entrenched in the northern areas of Kosovo. Tension is prevalent on both sides of the divide. Will there be a repeat of the 2004 Pogrom, is a question which now hangs weightily in the air. Would there be reprisals in the southern regions of Kosovo, which are Serb populated and replete with sanctuaries, both ancient and contemporary?

The United States of America can prevent such potential bloodshed and wholesale destruction, as it did decisively in 2004. The situation is tenuous, and timing is critical. Most senior members of the diplomatic corps are on break and absent, creating a vacuum in which extremism can take its own tragic course.

I am grateful in advance for your timely consideration of this most urgent matter.

Respectfully,

+IRINEJ
Bishop of Eastern America
The Serbian Orthodox Church



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