

Strategy for participation of the Churches and religious organizations in peacebuilding “Ukraine is our common home”¹

Ukrainian society needs peace in various aspects of its manifestation: at the personal level and in interpersonal relations, in professional and local communities, overall in the country and at the international level. Peace is a value for any society, regardless of its economic development, public welfare, political system, national, linguistic and religious diversity.

Peace is a gift from God, but the acceptance of this gift requires constant efforts of many individuals and public institutions, among which Churches and religious organizations, charitable foundations and public associations, other humanitarian institutions and the media play an important role. Religious communities possess great peacekeeping capacity, which is often underestimated; it is prevention, resistance, mediation, reconciliation, as all religions proclaim commitment to peace and love for one's neighbour.

Undoubtedly, religion can also be used as a dangerous and destructive weapon in conflict, but the common challenge for all denominations is to demonstrate one's own doctrinal and practical commitment to peace and to better realize own peacekeeping capacity. It is undeniable that many conflicts and wars would have been much bloodier without the influence of religious peacemakers, as in many cases they have greater trust from the conflicting parties, as the religious motivation of achieving peace awakens the trust of many people. At the same time, secular and religious peacemakers should, certainly, not be considered as rivals, they should be perceived as partners in cooperation, because each of them has experience that can complement each other.

Religiously motivated figures can make a decisive contribution to avoid or de-escalate social conflicts that no one else would be able or would want to do. Their voice in society should, therefore, be visible so that their competence to promote peace can be embodied and realized in a best way.

Nowadays in Ukraine there are many social challenges and faults that need healing and joint actions to overcome them. Among them, we can mention long-standing problems:

¹ This document was the fundament of the speech of Rev. Andriy Nahirniak that represented the Ukrainian Greek-Catholic Church. The document was developed and adopted by the Commission on the matters of social service of the All-Ukrainian Council of Churches and Religious Organizations. Signed by the Chairman of AUCCRO Ahmed Tamim, Chairman of the Clerical Board of Ukraine's Muslims (DUMU), Mufti of Ukraine, December 10, 2017.

- lack of public trust, which hinders the economic, political and social development of the country;
- a significant gap between the rich and the poor, resulting in a very weak presence of the middle class as a key indicator of the country's economic health and public welfare;
- widespread corruption: both at the household level and at the top of the state power;
- deficiencies in the justice system, which should have guaranteed justice and the rule of law, equality of all before the law and the inevitability of punishment for crime, regardless of position and social status;
- encroaching on the family institution and attempting to distort the understanding of spouses as union of a man and a woman;
- manipulations and misunderstandings around the language issue;
- different views on historical events and personalities;
- rare local inter-church conflicts, related to the solution of property issues by religious communities.

New social challenges have been added to them:

- a large number of our fellow citizens, to varying degrees having been affected by the war in the East of Ukraine and by the illegal annexation of the Autonomous Republic of Crimea, which, among other things, have entailed many emotional wounds, uncertainty about the future, aggression to others;
- emergence of hundreds of thousands internally displaced people and the need to integrate them into local communities at their new place of residence;
- reintegration of the population of the temporarily occupied territories of Donetsk and Luhansk regions, the Autonomous Republic of Crimea;
- the problem of the release of the hostages (prisoners), who are being held by the so-called “Donetsk and Luhansk people’s republics” on the territory outside of the government control in the East of Ukraine;
- proliferation of illegal weapons and the lowering of the psychological threshold for the use of violence to settle vital cases;
- the mass dissemination of misinformation and deliberately constructed false news (fakes) that make it difficult to establish the truth and, thus, provoke wrong decisions and paralyze dialogue.

Thus, this Strategy aims to define the goals and tasks of peacebuilding in Ukraine as a healthy response to these social challenges, primarily, to address the root causes of the conflict and to prevent its recurrence. Peacebuilding is a long-term but vital process that will

be successful thanks to the synergy of efforts of the representatives of different denominations and communities. After all, today more than ever, we all need peace; we need peace in our souls, in our families and in our common home – Ukraine.

Each of us in our Ukrainian home has the opportunity and is called upon to show respect and mercy to our neighbour, to respect the dignity and equal rights of each person, not to be intolerant towards the natural differences of each person and their otherness (skin color, language, nationality, religion, cultural differences, etc.). Disputes and disagreements occur within each family and, thanks to the good will of each of the relatives, are resolved through friendly dialogue, forgiveness and manifestation of love for the sake of preserving and strengthening the family. As well as in society in general, everyone has to assume his or her part of the duty to preserve and expand the expanses of peace for the common good of affirmation of unity, mutual trust and common welfare.

As well as destructive fires begin with carelessness and frivolity, the escalation of mutual aggression and enmity can be ignited by a single careless word or act. However, realizing the common responsibility for peace, security and welfare in our country, we can all together as a community and each individually as a citizen and believer:

- appease existing social tensions;
- not to stir up new conflicts;
- avoid premature social condemnation and over-criticism;
- reject stereotyping of other people and communities;
- create a space of trust and mutual support around ourselves, thus, protecting our home from inflating envy, anger, intolerance, and hatred.

Peace or discord is our own choice! And we make this choice every day: when we meet people who have a different background; who looks, thinks or talks in other way; when we decide what kind of statement to make, which news to share and a comment of what content to write in social networks; when we choose between passivity and non-indifference in the face of neighboring or social adversity.

We ourselves create the atmosphere of relations, that are being formed with people around us. This is, obviously, confirmed by those countries, where smile and friendliness towards strangers have become an expressive element of their national culture. Even talking about the situation when a country is at war, one should not forget that the military protect the peaceful life of their country and their goal is peace.

Blessed are the peacemakers! This is a God-pleasing work, and each of us can join it: in our family, at our workplace, in our community, through our active civic position.

Through finding in the Scriptures a high standard of human relationships based on love for one's neighbour, religious communities in general and their members in particular can become peacemakers and active participants in peacebuilding initiatives, that should be based on such fundamental principles:

- faith in God;
- love for one's neighbour;
- empathy (compassion, sympathy), unindifference;
- respect for dignity and full rights of others;
- trust building;
- cohesion and solidarity;
- interaction.

Having set before ourselves a common **goal of reaching peace, let's ensure that our common home is a comfortable and safe place for everyone – in diversity of nationalities and languages, religions and beliefs, professions and vocations.** We can achieve this by adhering to three basic rules in our relationships with those around us:

- 1) To hear!
- 2) To understand!
- 3) To act together!

At the same time, this approach allows us to highlight strategic goals and more specific tasks in peacebuilding sphere in Ukraine.

1. TO HEAR

1.1. Recognition of the truth

First of all, reconciliation should begin with the definition of truth, which consists in finding facts. Without truth, reconciliation is impossible, otherwise, both sides risk putting the stereotypes, myths, interpretations into the basis of the dialogue, which, most often, lead to divisions and conflicts and, therefore, cannot serve as a basis for understanding.

In this perspective, it is recommended to undertake such peacebuilding activities:

- Raising awareness, especially, among schoolchildren and youth, through educational and training activities on the linguistic, national and religious diversity of Ukraine;
- improving media literacy, in particular, the ability to decode false information;
- conducting courses on the literate and safe use of social networks;

- early detection of carriers of false information and increasing confidence towards the position of moral authorities and recognized experts.

1.2. Elimination of stereotypes

Our perception of an interlocutor, a particular social group, a religious denomination or a community depends directly on our understanding of them. Superficial awareness, lack of professional knowledge and the use of secondary sources of information often lead to trust in myths and interpretations rather than in facts. This, in turn, causes extremes in perception and takes root in the form of bias and erroneous judgments.

The danger in fostering myths and stereotypes lies in their closed nature: on the one hand, they feed on propaganda and information manipulation, and, on the other hand, they themselves become the source of such propaganda. Therefore, it is important to dispel myths and eliminate stereotypes, so that they do not hinder our perception of the other side of the dialogue.

In this perspective, it is recommended to undertake such peacebuilding activities:

- Promoting culture of mutual respect, peaceful coexistence in the diversity of languages, nationalities, religions, honoring dignity and rights of other human beings, regardless of opinions and any differences etc.;
- Cultivating high moral values, based on religious teaching, as love for one's neighbour, tolerance, mutual respect, unindifference, trust, etc., also in denominational educational institutions, Sunday/Saturday schools in churches and religious communities;
- Agreeing on adherence to a culture of communication and criticism that suggests the inadmissibility of bullying, of the use of offensive words and manifestation of disdain for the representatives of other language preferences, nationalities, religions, political views, social status or place of residence;
- Improving the qualifications of clerics and the representatives of churches and religious organizations, so that their pastoral and peacebuilding activities be free from stereotypes;
- Avoiding hasty judgements and stereotypical assessments of other people and communities, shaping instead of this one's own vision about them through deepening awareness and with help of direct dialogue;
- Developing and implementing asymmetric information strategies in response to propaganda and information manipulations, for example, taking measures aimed at developing "human-to-human" communication.

2. TO UNDERSTAND

2.1. Dialogue

Reconciliation is a process based on readiness for dialogue. For further successful interaction with each other it is necessary to understand the peculiarities and motivation of the other side. And the dialogue, as a form of direct knowledge, is the best tool for understanding, debunking myths and propaganda images, removing stereotypes.

In direct communication during the dialogues, we are able to meet real people, not images, formed by television, opinion leaders in social networks or targeted propaganda. Knowing people's real position – what their beliefs are based on, what they really think and how they will act in a given situation – allows us to understand better how we should act in a concrete situation.

Dialogue is not the same as negotiation. It is not about convincing another person at all costs, or trying to reach a common solution for its further implementation. Instead of this, dialogue aims to understand the vision of the other side and to find out what expectations, fears or stereotypes influence the formation of its position.

The result of the dialogue can consist in clarification of the essence of the differences in each other's positions and in better understanding of what steps each side can take in terms of a different vision of the situation, in order to prevent further escalation of the conflict and promote peace. The dialogue is aimed at finding an opportunity to take into account the interests of different communities and to find an appropriate balance of interests, so that the conflict loses its meaning and becomes disadvantageous for each of the parties.

In this perspective, it is recommended to undertake such peacebuilding activities:

- Promotion of interfaith and other forms of social dialogue at the national and local levels as a means of understanding, conflicts management and promotion of interaction;
- Participation in “people's diplomacy” in order to create and maintain a permanent dialogue directly between different groups of citizens, living on different sides of the contact line in the East of Ukraine and the occupied Autonomous Republic of Crimea;
- Participation in the development of state strategies for the reintegration of the population of the temporarily occupied territories of Donetsk and Luhansk regions, the Autonomous Republic of Crimea, which should include measures to restore ties, people's diplomacy and the establishment of direct dialogue (a good example: actions “East and West together” to organize recreation for the children from the East of Ukraine in the western regions of the country);

- Promotion of the structured dialogues and organization of dialogue platforms on encouraging tolerance and mutual respect in conflict regions, communities and during public discussions on ideological issues.

2.2. Forgiveness

One of the outcomes of the dialogue should consist in recognizing the hardships that we have suffered and that we may have caused someone. “Forgive and ask for forgiveness” could be a universal formula for peacebuilding.

Forgiveness is an important part of peacekeeping on the road to de-escalation and conflict solution. If a person forgives, he or she is not only able to overcome a conflict, but he or she wins the conflict, because, thus, prevents enmity from capturing his or her heart. Participants in peacekeeping initiatives should emphasize that forgiveness, like peacebuilding in general, is possible before the end of a conflict, not only after its final solution.

Forgiveness is important for restoring trust. The economy, politics and society as a whole cannot develop without strengthening public trust. Trust is the foundation of human relations, and when they deteriorate, only forgiveness can restore them.

In this perspective, it is recommended to undertake such peacebuilding activities:

- Conducting active pastoral work to reveal the religious content of forgiveness, which is a conscious and voluntary act of a human being on the road to reconciliation;
- Opposing the distorted understanding of forgiveness as an unjustified “gift” to the abuser and as manifestation of subjugation to his pressure.

3. TO ACT TOGETHER

3.1. Promotion of justice

Another important step towards peacebuilding is the establishment of justice. This can be the protection of the injured, who are suffering because of the imperfection of the Ukrainian justice system, which would guarantee justice and the rule of law and equality of all before the law. Special area of joint activities is the area of social protection for those, who have found themselves in difficult life circumstances. In particular, it may be related to the compensation for damages, caused by the conflict, on the basis of established facts, because injustice must be corrected. Religious communities, social, human rights’ and other humanitarian institutions can work together in a variety of ways to achieve these objectives, what will contribute significantly to peacebuilding.

In this perspective, it is recommended to undertake such peacebuilding activities:

- Providing legal protection to aggrieved individuals and communities against unjust accusations, lawlessness, arbitrariness, injustices by corrupt law enforcement and judicial officials;
- Counteracting the silence on committed abuses, lawlessness, injustices; promoting publicity and disclosure of facts of injustices in the interest of the betterment of society through the unavoidability of punishment for crimes and offences;
- Supporting socially vulnerable segments of the population (homeless people, orphans, the elderly and people with disabilities, the seriously ill, etc.) and taking measures aimed at overcoming poverty and ensuring access to work, namely through the development of social entrepreneurship programs;
- Providing spiritual, psychological, material, financial and medical assistance to persons, who have suffered because of the war in the East of Ukraine, helping them recover their material losses and heal both mental and physical wounds;
- Contributing to the release of the hostages (prisoners), being held in the Eastern Ukraine by the so-called “Donetsk and Luhansk people’s republics”, as well as our fellow citizens, being unjustly detained and convicted on political charges in the Autonomous Republic of Crimea and in Russia.

3.2. Joint actions

The ultimate goal of peacebuilding initiatives is to bring people’s hearts back to each other and to establish cooperation between them. It is important to create a good neighbourhood’s atmosphere, which becomes possible through mutual understanding and dialogue, which, in turn, opens opportunities for cooperation.

Religious and other communities are called upon to set an example of peacebuilding for the general public by working together to promote peace, mutual respect and unity in the society. In this context it is important to understand that the interaction of the Churches and religious communities of different denominations in peacebuilding and other socially important issues does not entail a threat of identity erasure. On the contrary, this kind of cooperation between individual believers and religious communities with different identities is a powerful manifestation of the peacebuilding essence of religion, when the representatives of different religious denominations can cooperate, preserving their own doctrinal and religious features, for the sake of public welfare, the establishment of public morality and peace.

The highest level of public trust, enjoyed by the Church institution in Ukraine, and a shared commitment to peace in the doctrines of all denominations demonstrate that this exceptional potential of the Churches and religious organizations can better serve in the matter of peacebuilding.

In this perspective, it is recommended to undertake such peacebuilding activities:

- Praying for peace in Ukraine, for healing and overcoming social divisions, for restoring righteousness, justice, and the rule of law;
- Refusing to use hate speech against each other, also against the representatives of other denominations, communities, social groups, political parties and authorities;
- Promoting interdenominational cooperation in various areas, aimed at establishing justice and building peace (a good example: the activities of the interdenominational mission “Spiritual and charitable trusteeship in the detention facilities”);
- Creating a culture of ecumenical and interfaith cooperation in the society for the benefit of all citizens, encouraging positive initiatives and noting positive experience of cooperation.