

ХРЫСЦІЯНСКАЯ ВІЗІЯ
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Statement of the Christian Vision Group of Coordination Council Regarding the Persecution of the Centre for Environmental Solutions

23 July 2021

On Tuesday, 20 July 2021, the offices of several non-governmental organisations, including the Centre for Environmental Solutions, were searched. On Friday, 23 July, the Centre was added to the list of NGOs for forced dissolution by the state authorities.

The Centre for Environmental Solutions was established to promote an environmentally-conscious lifestyle and principles of sustainable development in Belarus, and develop international collaborative work for preservation of the environment. The Centre has actively worked with Belarusian churches and the European Christian Environmental Network, ECEN.

One of the Centre's projects was the Church and Environmental Protection programme (tvorenje.by) initiated with the support of the Synodal Department for Youth of the Belarusian Orthodox Church in 2014. The programme was curated by a theologian, Siarhei Yushkevich, of the Institute of Theology of the Belarusian State University.

The Centre developed a traveling exhibition, Human and Creation, - a colorful visual narrative about protecting the environment and the ways Christians could participate in caring for God's creation. The exhibition was produced in two versions: for Orthodox and Catholic believers. Over the years, it was displayed in a number of towns and cities of the country. In September 2020, the Centre prepared an information display about the Orthodox Christian view on ecology. The display was unveiled in the metropolitan parish of St. Nicholas of Japan, Minsk. The official website of the Belarusian Orthodox Church regularly publicised the Centre's activities.

The Centre has opened three ecological trails: in 2016, in the parish of St. Nicholas of Japan, Minsk; in 2019, in the parish of the Intercession of the Most Holy Mother of God, in the village of Bohina, Braslaŭski district; in 2020, in the St. JelisiejLaŭryšaŭski monastery, Navahrudski district.

The working group for the implementation of the programme of cooperation between the Belarusian Orthodox Church and the Ministry of Natural Resources and Environmental Protection of the Republic of Belarus was led by Evgeniy Lobanov. The 2016-2020 programme was signed by the then Minister of Natural Resources Andrei Kovkhuto and the

then Patriarchal Exarch of All Belarus, Metropolitan Pavel on 15 December 2015. For a long time, Evgeniy Lobanov was also a leader of the Orthodox youth in Belarus and an executive secretary of the Youth Association of the Belarusian Orthodox Church. The environment has always been of paramount concern to the Association. It organised regular environmental seminars and days of prayer for God's creation.

We strongly condemn the forced dissolution of the Centre for Environmental Solutions, as well as other non-governmental civil society organisations; unlawful searches, detentions and other forms of harassment in order to intimidate and obstruct activities of non-governmental organisations.

We call on the global Christian community to note the persecution of the Centre for Environmental Solutions and express our solidarity with the workers of the organisation.

We call on the leadership of the Belarusian Orthodox Church to raise their voices in defense of the faithful who have undertaken various ministries in the Church for many years, established from scratch and developed an important area of church activity for protection of God's creation.