



RUSSIAN CONGRESS OF CANADA ADDRESS TO CANDIDATES IN 2015 CANADIAN FEDERAL ELECTIONS

October 2015

Dear Candidate,

We are the Russian Congress of Canada, the organization that makes every effort to facilitate and support the growth of trustful relationships with all ethnic communities in Canada and to contribute to the advancement and strengthening of friendly relations between Canada and Russia. In the last two years, the Russian community has been faced with an unprecedented amount of propaganda, disinformation, outright bigotry and cold war era stereotypes disseminated by Ukrainian nationalist organizations in Canada, mainstream media, special interest groups and certain elements within the Canadian government. All attempts by the Russian community, many members of the Ukrainian community and anti-war organizations to draw the attention of Canadian officials and the public to the harsh treatment of minorities, ongoing grave violations of civil rights, the crackdown on freedom of speech, political violence and the violation of economic and property rights of Russian and other minority groups in Ukraine has been ignored by the media, government and Canadian political parties. We feel strongly that there is currently a unique situation in Canada, where a small but very vocal minority of Ukrainian nationalists represented by the Ukrainian Canadian Congress has been allowed to dictate Canadian foreign policy, often in a direction opposite to the values enshrined in the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms* and greatly to the economic detriment of Canada and its citizens. Therefore we would like to voice our concerns directly to you in order to provide you with our view of the situation and to express our most urgent concerns over the situation in Ukraine.

Civil rights violations and assault on the rights of minorities in Ukraine

On May 21, 2015, the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine passed a resolution declaring its withdrawal from some of the obligations stipulated in the *International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights* (articles 2, 9, 12, 14 and 17), the *Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms* (articles 5, 6, 8 and 13) and the *European Social Charter* (articles 1 p. 2, 4 p. 2-3, 8 p. 1, 14 p. 1, 15, 16, 17 p. 1a, p. 1c, 23, 30 and 31 p. 1-2) with respect to the Donbass region until Russia agrees to "cease its aggression in eastern Ukraine"ⁱ. The Rada thereby limited or denied about 3 million people their rights to: life, liberty, security, fair trial, freedom of movement, privacy rights, protection against illegal and indefinite detention, just conditions of work and a safe workplace environment, the right of workers to an increased rate of remuneration for overtime work, equal pay for men and women, paid leave and adequate social benefits, provision of social services including healthcare and education, economic and social protection of families, norms preventing child labour, protection of orphans, the right of the elderly to adequate social protection including the obligation to pay old age pensions, the right to protection against poverty and social exclusion, and the right to housing. All of the above rights were denied to citizens of Ukraine who were unfortunate enough to be living in the territory of the conflict in eastern Ukraine, regardless of whether they had dared to express their opposition to the current government of Ukraine. In our opinion, it represents a clear case of collective punishment. The withdrawal from obligations was undertaken by the Ukrainian authorities to legitimize the continual violations of human rights on the territory of Ukraine since the beginning of the conflict. In essence, the Ukrainian government created a zone on both sides of the contact line where the worst cases of human rights abuse can and are being carried out against the population by Ukrainian government officials, members of the Ukrainian Armed Forces, and various paramilitary outfits and ultra-nationalist battalions.

According to "Report On the Human Rights Situation In Ukraine", published by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights and the reports of the OSCE Special Monitoring Mission in Ukraine, Ukrainian Armed Forces have been conducting indiscriminate shellingⁱⁱ of civilian areas. Especially badly hit are large urban conglomerations around Donetsk,

which used to be one of the most densely populated and urbanized areas in Europeⁱⁱⁱ. During the winter months of December to February 2015, Donetsk and surrounding satellite cities were heavily shelled every day, resulting in heavy civilian casualties and damage to infrastructure. The numerous cases of summary execution, illegal detention, forced labour, torture and mistreatment of prisoners and civilians by Ukrainian Armed Forces, Right Sector battalions and various other paramilitary outfits have been documented by the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights^{iv}, the OSCE and other international monitoring agencies.

According to the same sources, the Ukrainian government continues to restrict transit of humanitarian cargo including medicine, relief items and even food across the contact line. Severe restrictions have also been placed on the movement of civilians across the contact line. The Ukrainian government has denied social services to its citizens in the conflict area, including payment of old age pensions and social benefits, the provision of health services and education.^v This has left thousands of the most vulnerable citizens without any means of survival.^{vi} As a result, despite the efforts of humanitarian organizations and Russia, there have been a number of well-documented cases of death from starvation amongst the elderly, disabled people and people with mental disability^{vii}. Overall, despite the current ceasefire, the situation for the inhabitants of the conflict zone remains dire.

Freedom of speech situation, Kotsaba, Buzina and arrests of political activists, including detention of Odessa Massacre victims

The situation with human rights outside of the immediate conflict zone in Ukraine remains abominable as well. Ukraine continues to restrict journalistic activity on its territory, including the recent banning of 41 journalists and bloggers^{viii}. A number of prominent journalists and writers, like Oles Buzina^{ix}, have been murdered, or thrown in jail on trumped-up charges. One particular case characterizes the situation with freedom of speech in Ukraine. A well-respected journalist, Ruslan Kotsaba, was thrown in jail and charged with High Treason for posting an anti-war Youtube video^x. His detention has recently been extended. A number of opposition publications, like newspaper Vesti.UA, have either been raided by law enforcement officers or had their offices trashed by ultra-nationalists with police deciding not to intervene^{xi}. The situation is not much better for the opposition parties and activists with a number of them being held under arrest or forced to live under continuous threat of violence from radical nationalists. In particular, the Communist Party of Ukraine and the Opposition Block had a number of their offices raided^{xii}, ransacked and burned by radical nationalist outfits. Other political parties, organizations and civil rights activists (including LGBTQ^{xiii} activists) have had their right of peaceful assembly denied or their events violently disrupted by members of the Right Sector ultra-nationalist organization. In some cases the police have intervened on the side of the ultra-nationalists. Several prominent politicians and activists have been murdered recently, including Oles Buzina, a prominent Ukrainian writer, whose crime was daring to advocate against war and for establishing a direct dialogue between Kiev and the Donetsk and Lugansk Regions. He was shot in front of his house two days after a website affiliated with the Ministry of Internal Affairs, and actively promoted by an adviser to the Minister of Internal Affairs, Mr. Gerashenko, had posted all of his private information including his address and phone number. The above-mentioned website called “Mirotvorec” (<https://psb4ukr.org>) had been promoted by Mr. Gerashenko and other political figures within the Ukrainian government and parliament as a tool for exposing and cataloguing people who they consider to be “terrorists and their supporters”^{xiv}. The website had published personal information, including addresses, phone numbers and even medical records of the enemies of the current regime. Seven prominent opposition members and activists, including Oles Buzina, had their lives taken a few

days after their personal information was published on the “Mirotvorec”^{xv}. Despite protests and pressure to close it down, the website is still active.

Glorification of Nazism and incorporation of radical ultra-nationalists and neo-Nazi battalions into government structures

The other troubling development since the current government came into power has been the legitimization and glorification of Nazi collaborators and the incorporation of radical nationalists and adherents of neo-Nazi ideology into government bodies. During the Maidan events, members of radical nationalist and right-wing organizations played a very significant role as foot soldiers, agitators and organizers^{xvi}. Despite the best efforts of the current Ukrainian government and their Western allies, including Harper's government, to downplay the role of radical nationalists, their activities have been well documented by independent journalists, academics and international organizations. In particular an ultra-nationalist organization, the Right Sector, was formed during the Maidan events out of several openly neo-Nazi organizations^{xvii}. Members of Right Sector were involved in street violence during the Maidan events, assaulting, shooting and throwing Molotov cocktails at police officers and at their political opponents. After the current government came to power, radical nationalists continued to play a significant role in the suppression of the political opponents of the current regime, both in and outside of the conflict zone, as part of nationalist battalions. Members of Right Sector have taken part in assaults against the Communist Party of Ukraine, the Opposition Block^{xviii} and offices of media outlets. They also played an active role in the events of the Odessa Massacre^{xix}. In addition, Right Sector has been involved in the abduction of political opponents and the illegal takeover of businesses and enterprises^{xx}. Inside the conflict zone, members of Right Sector units have often been accused of indiscriminately shelling civilian areas, torture, summary executions, running illegal internment camps and demanding ransom for hostages^{xxi}. All of these facts have been documented by international organizations. The Ukrainian government has acknowledged that it has limited control over the ultra-nationalist paramilitary units operating inside the conflict zone. The lack of control was further confirmed by the events of July 10, 2015, in Mukacheve in Western Ukraine, where members of Right Sector had clashed with security services.^{xxii} To remedy the situation, the Ukrainian government attempted to incorporate them and other nationalist outfits into the structures of the Ministry of Internal Affairs and Ministry of Defence. For example, the ‘Azov’ battalion, that consists largely of local and foreign neo-Nazis and white supremacists openly brandishing Nazi insignias, has been renamed as a ‘Special Operations Regiment’.^{xxiii} On June 12, 2015, the US House of Representatives passed an amendment to the Department of Defense Appropriations Act blocking any aid (including arms and training) to the battalion due to its neo-Nazi background. While the Ukrainian Rada had passed a law criminalizing the open display of neo-Nazi symbols and propaganda for Nazi and communist ideology, to this day no action had been taken to crack down on either Right Sector, ‘Azov’ or other neo-Nazi outfits.

At the same time, the Ukrainian government continues its efforts to glorify and legitimize Nazi collaborators such as Stepan Bandera, the Ukrainian Insurgent Army (UPA) and the Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists (OUN), who were directly responsible for or participated in ethnic cleansing of Jews, Poles, Russians and Belarusians during World War II^{xxiv}, with a death toll of several hundred thousand people.

The Ukrainian government is busy re-writing history text books in an attempt to justify or downplay the horrific nature of these organizations and to portray them instead as valiant fighters for an independent Ukraine. This position is shared by the Ukrainian Canadian Congress, who has called for Nazi collaborators to receive the same pensions and benefits that veterans who fought against Nazism enjoy here in Canada.^{xxv} The policy of glorification of Nazi collaborators and the denial of their responsibility for war crimes has led to an increase in violence against minorities, organizations and cultural sites. Babi Yar memorial, where hundreds of thousands of Jews, Roma, Russians, Poles and Belorusians were executed by the SS and their Ukrainian collaborators during World War II , has been damaged six times since the beginning of this year by vandals^{xxvi}.

Canadian government involvement in conflict and inconsistency of it with values of Canadians

The facts presented in this letter are just some of the horrible human rights violations conducted by Ukrainian government and the radical ultra-nationalist organizations that enjoy full support from the current Conservative government. The Canadian government provided both material support and training to one of the sides in an ongoing civil conflict. It continues to prop up a regime that has openly declared its withdrawal from several key human rights treaties. It supports a regime that doesn't hesitate to use violence against political opponents. Needless to say, such actions by the Ukrainian government stand in contradiction to the values expressed in the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms* and the values supported by all Canadians. Ask yourself if such a regime is one you can personally support.

Our organization consists of Canadian citizens who are proud to be Canadian, proud to live in a country where people of all nationalities can enjoy democratic rights and freedoms. We are incredibly lucky to live in a country where citizens of every ethnicity enjoy equal protection regardless of what language they speak, what gods they pray to and what political opinions they hold. Unfortunately for our community, the events of the last year and a half have been truly puzzling and disappointing. Our voices are either not being heard by the Canadian government and press, or are being muzzled by radical Ukrainian nationalists living here in Canada. Members of our Russian and Ukrainian communities who dare to oppose the civil conflict in Ukraine have received death threats or had their property vandalized. Our anti-war rallies have been disrupted by radical nationalists operating on Canadian soil. Our events and our attempt to bring these grave violations of human rights perpetrated against our relatives living in Ukraine continue to receive no coverage from the Canadian mainstream press, and when we do get some coverage, we are presented in an unfavourable light. Yet, what we want is peace for Ukraine, cessation of all hostilities, justice for the victims, restoration of human rights and dignity to all Ukrainians irregardless of ethnicity. We firmly believe that Canada is a peacekeeping nation that prides itself on helping to resolve conflicts, not to inflame them. We believe that Ukraine can learn a lot from Canadian values of tolerance and inclusion, from Canadian ways of managing to keep peace and prosperity in a country with two official languages.

Dear Candidate,

We call on to You to help us break this silence by at least considering the facts presented in this letter when you are elected and get the chance to make much needed changes in Ottawa. We count on to you to stand up for human rights, dignity and peace.

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- xii See “11th Report on Human Rights situation in Ukraine”, OHCHR, pg. 21, paragraph 80.
- xiii Ibid, paragraph 77
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