



Synod Office of The Reformed Church in Hungary

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To Whom It May Concern

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Subject: Public Statement on Concerns around Church Property Restitution in Romania

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with us all in these times of hardship.

Beside climate change, global financial and economic crisis, the COVID-19 pandemic constitutes a new, unprecedented challenge for all of us. Alongside big trials, our Lord is visiting us with many burdens in all shapes and sizes. Some of these loads are general and affect everyone, others are specific and relate only to a certain group of people.

It is comforting to know that in our common pilgrimage in fulfilling the law of Christ we are eager to bear one another's burdens. The truth of life is that at a certain time we are the ones needing help, but one another day we may be the givers of help. If COVID-19 has taught us anything, it's that life can change in a heartbeat.

In a world struggling with economic, social, ethnic disparity, and recently immune system deficiency, among us Christians is so true: "And whenever one member suffer, all the members suffer with it; or when one member is honored, all the members rejoice with it." (1 Corinthians 12:26)

We have also been aware that the respect for the rights of individuals belonging to minorities, including respect for the principle of non-discrimination, is one of the Union's founding principles, which we support wholeheartedly. On the one hand, we welcome the Union's commitment toward any other social minorities protected by strict anti-discrimination regulations are vigorously defended, European legal protection, not to mention political will, but on the other hand we are perplexed by the Union's hesitancy to take action whenever rights and peaceful cohabitation of ethnic minorities are concerned or threatened.

With these thoughts, we would like to bring to your attention a recent event that is once again causing serious harm to your member churches in Romania.

Despite various restitution laws and countless deadlines for implementation, minority churches in Romania have not to date had their former church property restituted in full. The Reformed Church in Romania is still deprived of many hundred facilities. Nationalisation, i.e., the confiscation of church property was forced by a post-1945 totalitarian regime. After the change of the political regime in 1989, the restitution of such properties should have been an objective of the state to repair the abuses of the past especially that churches have been seeking restitution of their property in order to resume their traditional activities for public benefit.

If church property restitution between 1990 and 2010 was characterised by neglect, inadequate legislation and implementation; since 2010 church property restitution in Romania has been delayed by legally persecuting and scapegoating minority churches and civil servants who try to implement the rule of law as regards property restitution.

For instance, Ethnic Hungarian former Member of Parliament, high-ranking Romanian government official, and member of the Special Restitution Committee of the National Authority for Property Restitution, Attila Markó's tribulation began in 2010 when he was falsely charged with "official abuse of power" for returning the Székely Mikó Reformed High School to its rightful owner, the Reformed Church. We were grateful for our ecumenical partners who heard our concerns, expressed their solidarity and took action in 2014.

Today, our communities face similar threats. In order to block church property restitution, a very similar incident is escalating now in Romania, as Bishop István Csűry (Church District of Királyhágómellék) and Bishop Béla Kató (Transylvanian Church District) of the Reformed Church in Romania are prosecuted on the charges of "document forgery", "bribery" and "abuse of falsified documents" in the case of a non-returned Reformed school in Romania.

The General Convent of the Hungarian Reformed Church, the Communion of the Reformed Churches in the Carpathian Basin, issued the attached public statement to express solidarity with the Bishops in Romania, and protest against tribulations they have to face in the process of the Restitution.

We would appreciate your solidarity with and support for your reformed member churches in Romania and its leaders.

I send you this letter and wish you God's blessing and peace on behalf of the General Convent.

p.p. Bishop Zoltán Balog
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of the Reformed Church in Hungary
Acting President
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