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Britain Sanctions Russian Patriarch for 'Prominent Support' of Ukraine War

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Patriarch Kirill, head of Russian Orthodox Church. **Kirill Zykov / Moskva News Agency**

The United Kingdom Thursday has unveiled sanctions against the head of the Russian Orthodox Church, Patriarch Kirill, for his support of Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

"Today we are targeting the enablers and perpetrators of Putin's war who have brought untold suffering to Ukraine," the British government said in a statement.

The measures, which include a travel ban and asset freezes, are the first Western sanctions to target the religious leader.

The Russian Orthodox Church dismissed the sanctions against its leader, saying: "Attempts to intimidate the primate of the Russian Church with something or to force him to renounce his views are senseless, absurd and unpromising."

Patriarch Kirill was excluded from the European Union's latest package of sanctions last month after Hungarian officials objected to the plan.

The Russian church leader has been widely criticized for his support for Moscow's invasion of Ukraine, with some rights groups calling for his indictment by the International Criminal Court.

The 75-year-old has been a key supporter of President Vladimir Putin's rule, blessing Russia's conflicts abroad and denouncing opposition protests. He has previously labeled Russia's opponents in Ukraine "evil forces."

Britain also placed sanctions on Russia's children's rights ombudswoman Maria Lvova-Belova for "her alleged involvement in the forced transfer and adoption of Ukrainian children."

Other individuals to make the sanction list include Moscow politician Sergei Savostyanov, Alexei Isaykin, the president of the Volga-Dnepr Group transport company, and four colonels from the Russian Ground Forces' 64th Separate Motorized Rifle Brigade, who are alleged to be involved in the killing, rape and torture of civilians in northern Ukraine's Bucha.

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