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Ukraine Files Charges Against Russian Orthodox Chief

By AFP

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Patriarch Kirill **TASS / Aleksandr Ryumin**

Ukraine said Saturday it had filed criminal charges against Patriarch Kirill, the leader of the Russian Orthodox Church, in absentia for "justifying" Russia's invasion.

Moscow's most influential spiritual leader, a fervent supporter of President Vladimir Putin, has called the war a historic battle against the "forces of evil".

The Security Service of Ukraine said it along with the prosecutor general's office had "collected evidence against the head of the Russian Orthodox Church, Vladimir Gundyaev [known as Kirill]".

It said he was "a member of the inner circle of Russia's top military and political leadership and ... one of the first to publicly support the full-scale war against Ukraine".

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It accused Kirill of "infringing" on Ukraine's territorial integrity, justifying armed aggression and planning and preparing an "aggressive war".

"Comprehensive measures are being taken to bring the offender to justice for crimes against our state," it said.

Ukraine, a predominantly Orthodox country, accelerated its drive to cut ties with all Russian-linked Orthodox institutions after the war began.

In October, Ukrainian lawmakers voted to ban the Moscow-linked Ukrainian Orthodox Church [UOC], accusing its clergymen of collaborating with Russia.

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