



THE SECRETARY OF STATE  
WASHINGTON

February 24, 2020

His Eminence  
Archbishop Elpidophoros  
Chairman of the Assembly  
of Canonical Orthodox Bishops  
10 East 79th Street  
New York, New York 10075

Your Eminence:

Thank you for your letter of January 16 sharing your concerns about Montenegro's Law on Freedom of Religion or Belief and the Legal Status of Religious Communities, which went into effect in February 2020. As you know, both President Trump and I are firm believers in the principle that individuals from every place on the globe have an inalienable right to peacefully and openly practice their faith.

The Department of State has been following very closely the development and passage of Montenegro's new religious freedom law. We understand some religious groups in Montenegro have voiced concerns over the law's provisions regarding property ownership and the legal process through which contested ownership will be adjudicated. Although the Government of Montenegro says it incorporated fully the suggestions given in the Opinion of the Venice Commission into the law, opponents of the legislation assert that the Montenegrin government did not carry out inclusive and detailed consultations with religious organizations and the public, as recommended by that commission. While the protests in Montenegro have been largely peaceful, we are concerned about the continuing tensions and recent isolated incidents of violence.

We are encouraging the Government of Montenegro to engage the Serbian Orthodox Church in an open and transparent dialogue about the law and its implementation. Any effort to consider the validity of property claims should comply fully with Montenegrin law and the European Convention on Human Rights.

I want to assure you that America's commitment to religious freedom will never waver.

Thank you for your dedication and that of the Assembly of Canonical Orthodox Bishops in protecting and promoting religious freedom both in the United States and around the world.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Michael R. Pompeo", written over a printed name.

Michael R. Pompeo