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The Honorable Donald J. Trump
President of the United States of America
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue NW
Washington, D.C. 20500

Dear Mr. President:

On behalf of the Serbian American Leadership Conference, a newly formed non-profit created to inspire the next generation of Serbian-American civic engagement, we wish you a Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year. Christ is born!

While it is our honor to wish you and your family a blessed holiday at this most glorious time of year, we regrettably write to bring to your urgent attention the recent actions by the Parliament of the Republic of Montenegro, led by the Democratic Party of Socialists, in passing the “Law on Freedom of Religion or Belief and Legal Status of Religious Communities.” Under the guise of religious freedom, this law egregiously and blatantly violates the religious freedom of our Eastern Orthodox Christian brothers and sisters in Montenegro by depriving them of their centuries-old property rights to hundreds of churches and monasteries built and owned by: the Orthodox Metropolitanate of Montenegro and the Littoral; the Orthodox Diocese of Budim and Niksic; the Orthodox Diocese of Miliesheva; the Orthodox Diocese of Zahumlje and Hercegovina; and the faithful Montenegrin Serb laity for over 800 years.

Religious leaders, legal experts, and human rights activists will broadly agree that the Montenegrin Government’s intention to seize ownership of churches and monasteries constructed before 1918 without formal documentation of rightful ownership is a deliberate violation of domestic laws and international conventions that protect the inviolability of the freedom of worship in the 21st century. Despite the earnest efforts by the Montenegrin opposition in amending Articles 62, 63, and 64 of the law to reflect an accurate representation of religious freedom in Montenegro, Montenegro’s ruling party has engaged in actions that will undoubtedly set a dangerous precedent for all the religious communities in Montenegro and the region. As your Administration has made the protection and promotion of religious freedom a hallmark of your foreign policy, these actions by the democratic socialists in the parliament of Montenegro disgracefully disregard your commitment – and the tireless efforts of your senior officials – to defend the rights of people of faith wherever they face persecution.

Mr. President, therefore, we urge you to use the authorities granted to you under the International Religious Freedom Act, 22 U.S.C. §§ 6441-61, to oppose the hostile seizure of Serbian Orthodox Christian places of worship by the Government of Montenegro and to promote the right to religious freedom of the Montenegrin Serbs and all other religious communities in Montenegro.

Respectfully yours,

Aleksandar Djuricic
President

Marko Duric
Vice President