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Orthodox priest expelled from Ukraine

Zenit News Agency (17.05.2000) / HRWF International Secretariat (22.05.2000) - Website: www.hrwf.net - Email: info@hrwf.net - A priest of the Moldavian Orthodox Church was arrested, detained for 3 days and expelled from Ukraine after visiting Dolinske, his birthplace in the Odessa region, and praying at his mother's grave, according to the Keston Institute.

Fr. Nicolae Asargiu, a Moldavian citizen, who was expelled from Ukraine in 1998 and prohibited from returning for 5 years, was accused of violating the Ukrainian religious law. The person in charge of religious affairs in Odessa, told Keston news that Fr. Asargiu had "committed a grave violation of the law by entering the country illegally," and that he was treated exactly like any other foreign citizen who violates the law.

Vlad Cubreacov, Moldavian parliamentary deputy and defender of the Church to which the priest belongs, told Keston that Fr. Asargiu crossed the Ukrainian border after his mother's death. His father, who is over 80, and his sister still live in Dolinske. The priest was arrested by the police in the town cemetery at the end of March. He was released on April 3, left Ukraine and had to go to hospital when he arrived in Chisinau, the capital of Moldavia. "Fr. Asargiu went on hunger strike when he was arrested and was released thanks to the intervention of the Moldavian and Romanian governments," Cubreacov told Keston.

The Department for Relations with Romanians Abroad, of the Romanian Administration, described Fr. Asargiu's detention as an "unacceptable abuse," which contravenes the laws of the Ukraine and its international commitments on human rights. The Romanian government asked the Ukrainian Embassy for an explanation on the measures taken against the Orthodox priest.