



VIGILARE

Zagreb, 4 August 2016

Re: Serbian government slander of Croatian Cardinal

Dear _____,

We would like to correct the historical untruths which high level Serbian government officials, particularly the Serbian Foreign Affairs Minister, Ivica Dačić have recently said about Zagreb's Archbishop and Cardinal, the Blessed Alojzije Stepinac (whom Pope John Paul II beatified on 3 October 1998 and for whom the canonisation process for sainthood has been completed with Pope Francis openly calling him a saint).

These include slanderous accusations that Cardinal Stepinac was the '*Vicar of the genocidal NDH regime*' and a '*war criminal*' who gave '*genocide his blessing*.' In addition to the historical untruths, they also attribute words to him which Cardinal Stepinac never uttered – praising the role of the Ustasha Movement and of the Axis Powers - but were rather those of a high level officer (Slavko Kvaternik) of the quisling Independent State of Croatia (NDH).

Cardinal Stepinac publicly opposed all totalitarian regimes and personally helped to save thousands of lives, amongst whom were a large number of ethnic Serbs, placing his own life at risk in the process.

The Serbian Government claims that in his 1941 Easter Sermon, Cardinal Stepinac preached that the '*the NDH was created by God's grace, by the wise sacrificial work of the Leader (Poglavnik)(Ante Pavelić) and by the Ustasha Movement, as well as by the will of our allies (Hitler and Mussolini)*.' These are actually the words of Slavko Kvaternik in his statement proclaiming the establishment of the NDH on 10 April 1941.

The text of Blessed Alojzije Stepinac's sermon on Easter Sunday (13 April 1941) could hardly have been more different. It is a call to peace, which he calls "one of the most beautiful gifts of Jesus Christ". It laments the "chaos" of war, the "sighs of the oppressed", and the "tears of the worn out and unfortunate".

The Serbian Government's slander against Blessed Alojzije Stepinac, involving a deliberately false attribution to him of words and sentiments he never uttered or held, is part of a wider and continuing slander campaign aimed at the Croatian people and State. This is particularly disturbing as Serbia is an EU candidate country which is expected to adhere to basic (European and) international mores, customs and values based on the respect of truth and rational facts. Such behaviour towards Croatia and as such the EU does not bode well for stability. We ask you and your colleagues to note these falsehoods and to be alert to any more which the Serbian campaign to delegitimise Croatia may involve in the future.

Yours sincerely,

Dr. Vice John Batarelo
President Vigilare

Dr. Robin Harris
Historian*

Mr. Don Markušić
Special Legal Advisor