



World Council of Churches

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Geneva, March 23, 2022

Mme Olena Zelenska
First Lady of Ukraine

Your Excellency,
Dear Mme Olena Zelenska,

Thank you for your warm and moving letter addressing me as “Father Ioan” as well as in my capacity as the acting general secretary of the World Council of Churches, and writing not as the wife of the President of Ukraine but “as a Ukrainian woman, a mother, and a wife. This is not even a letter - but the voice of my pain accumulated during these days of the war”.

Reading your letter I heard the cries and the weeping of the Ukrainian mothers who lost their children, of the families who lost their dear ones, the despair of those under the ruins of bombed houses, of those dehydrated and starving without hope of escape since the ravages of war do not allow for secure humanitarian corridors.

But I also hear the pain and suffering of Russian mothers, wives, children and parents who receive their dear ones in a coffin, from this illogical fratricide war. On both sides there is suffering and despair and all are waiting for an end of the conflict.

For me personally, myself an Orthodox priest, the pain and puzzlement is even greater: why do we have this destructive and fratricidal war between two sister nations and how is it possible for two peoples who are in their great majority fellow Orthodox believers to experience such atrocities when our Orthodox theology and the lives of our saints gave us such powerful examples of love, humility, respect, harmony and service to all the needy and suffering.

During the period of mounting tensions over Ukraine and following the outbreak of conflict on 24 February, WCC leadership and I have been intensively engaged in seeking ways to address the situation. On that very day of 24 February when the war started, I made a strong statement supporting the statement of Metropolitan Onufriy and called on President Putin to “stop this fratricidal war, and to restore peace to the people and nation of Ukraine”.

Most of those efforts have not been possible to share in any public or semi-public domain in real-time. But I want to share with you this update on our initiatives thus far and what are currently envisaged as next steps.

WCC is in close contact with ACT Alliance regarding church-based humanitarian responses to the situation in Ukraine and in neighbouring countries due to the conflict. Most recently, a [joint delegation visit took place in the region 14-18 March](https://www.oikoumene.org/news/church-response-to-refugees-im-seeing-the-image-of-god-in-you), to Hungary and Romania and border regions of Ukraine. <https://www.oikoumene.org/news/church-response-to-refugees-im-seeing-the-image-of-god-in-you>

Having seen the impact of the conflict in the faces of refugees arriving in these neighbouring countries, and being aware of the plight and peril of all those civilians still trapped and unable to flee, we strongly underscore the urgent necessity of effective and secure humanitarian corridors to enable civilians to escape the fighting. I urge the Russian and Ukrainian forces, and the political leadership of both countries, to coordinate to ensure that such corridors are established and maintained until all those that wish to leave have done so. Moreover, I appeal to all those mounting the attacks that threaten civilians to remember their moral and legal responsibility to protect civilians, and their accountability before God for all innocent lives lost.

Already on [25 January 2022](#) WCC issued an [urgent appeal for peace](#) for the people of Ukraine, urging consideration of “the death and suffering that any armed conflict would inevitably visit on the children, women and men of Ukraine.” The statement noted that “God’s people – and members of the ecumenical fellowship – find themselves on both sides of the current confrontation”, but declared that “our God is a God of peace, not of war and bloodshed. Though the things that make for peace may be hidden from the eyes of those driving the march to war, we pray that they may yet be opened, and that peace may yet prevail.”

On [22 February 2022](#) WCC issued a [further statement appealing for “de-escalation and reduction of tensions, and for respect for international law and established national borders.”](#) The statement called for “a return to dialogue and to the principles of the Minsk Agreements as a pathway to a peaceful resolution of the longstanding tensions and divisions in the region, within the framework of international law and commitments.”

On [24 February 2022](#), as news of the invasion and armed conflict was breaking, the WCC issued a [further statement](#): “The World Council of Churches denounces any and every use of deadly armed force to resolve disputes that could be resolved by dialogue. We firmly believe that dialogue - based on the principles of international law and respect for established national borders - was and is the proper path for the resolution of tensions surrounding Ukraine. We call for an immediate end to the current armed hostilities, and for the protection of all human lives and communities threatened by this violence. We urge all member churches and all people of good will around the world to join us in prayer for peace for the people of Ukraine and the region.”

Also during the morning of 24 February 2022, I undertook [urgent consultations with representatives of the Russian Orthodox Church](#) to compare understandings of what was occurring and its causes.

On [2 March 2022](#), as prayers for peace in Ukraine were taking place in churches around the world, I issued an [appeal to H.H. Patriarch Kirill](#) of the Russian Orthodox Church/Moscow Patriarchate “to intervene and mediate with the authorities to stop this

war, the bloodshed and the suffering, and to make efforts to bring peace through dialogue and negotiations.”

As World Council of Churches, we have already made many statements condemning the war, calling for respect for international humanitarian law and for solving the conflict through dialogue. Our member Churches have also made many strong and bold statements of their own. We could make yet another statement, but I did not feel that it could really help. I have decided after reading your letter to contact the two Presidents, their Excellencies President Putin of the Russian Federation and President Zelensky of Ukraine, asking them to make an effort to come to the table of dialogue and to stop the bloodshed and destruction of Ukraine.

I attach the letter sent to the two presidents.

Your Excellency, esteemed Mme Olena Zelenska, I would like to close my letter by expressing my deep admiration for your hard work in the service of your country, for your care for the suffering, needy and refugees, for your efforts to speak out to the world about the tragic reality your people are currently enduring. May God give you strength and may He always accompany you in your work.

Many thanks for your invitation to come to Kyiv, together with other religious leaders. I pray God that before the great feast of Easter peace may prevail and the war will stop and I will be able to come to Kyiv and celebrate together the joyful feast of Easter and proclaim together with Christ's Resurrection a free, renewed and resurrected Ukraine.

With all my respect and love,



Father Ioan Saucă
Acting General Secretary
World Council of Churches