



# World Council of Churches

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Geneva, March 23, 2022

H.E. Vladimir Vladimirovich Putin  
President of the Russian Federation

H.E. Volodymyr Oleksandrovytch  
Zelensky  
President of Ukraine

Your Excellencies,

It is with pain of heart and after long reflection and prayer that I write to you this letter.

A few days ago I received a letter from the First Lady of Ukraine, Her Excellency Olena Volodymyrivna Zelenska, pleading that the World Council of Churches become “the voice of those who suffer from war today” and “mediators in the real humanitarian corridors”.

She wrote to me as the leader of WCC, this worldwide Christian Ecumenical organisation with its 352 member Churches from all over the world and more than 580 million people. But what really broke my heart and made me write to you this letter is the way she addressed me as “dear Father Ioan”, saying that she did not write to me as the First Lady 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”.

I am not a politician nor a diplomat either. Therefore, I write to you this pastoral letter as a priest and spiritual leader, listening to the cries of your own faithful peoples, voicing their despair and suffering.

I hear in the words of the First Lady of Ukraine 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 in the absence of 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 fratricidal war. On both sides there is suffering and despair and all are waiting for an end of the conflict. And while the war rages, I am especially troubled by the disregard for the most fundamental moral and legal principles demanding protection of civilians and civilian infrastructure. I appeal as earnestly as I can for civilians to be spared from further attacks, and that humanitarian corridors to enable them to escape from peril be established, maintained and secured.

As World Council of Churches, we have already made 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 can make yet another statement, but I did not feel that it could really help.

Excellencies, the end of conflict and the agreement on a peaceful solution is in your hands alone. Before your people and history, you will be the only ones responsible for it. No one from outside can solve or seek to impose any solution to this fraternal conflict.

We see now clear moves towards a new division in the world, a new alignment. We hear about a project for a new world order, a critical escalation of political and military tensions between east and west, raising again the spectre of nuclear conflagration, and portending at least another longstanding division of the continent of Europe. In the midst of a crisis of these dimensions, the whole world is searching for signs of hope for a peaceful solution. Please, do not let yourself be the instruments of such a new division and do not internationalize your family conflict.

You are two nations with two internationally recognised independent lands. Yet, you are and will always be sister nations. No one can deny or destroy that reality. You have Russian speaking Ukrainians and Ukrainian speaking Russians. They live together, many in mixed families. I have had Ukrainian and Russian students for 20 years during my career as Professor at the Ecumenical Institute of Bossey, Switzerland. They would proudly expose their distinct identity as nations and would be proud of the flag of their countries; otherwise they were always together. On Sundays, both Russians and Ukrainians would join the same Orthodox Church in the Geneva Old Town and would pray together. They would proudly identify one another as Russians and Ukrainians but with a spiritual bond no one could destroy. In the light of the above, for those of us who know your peoples, it is very painful to hear these days' hard words demonizing one another, full of hatred, and the rest of the world taking sides.

The World Council of Churches also needs both peoples. It continues to be an open and safe platform where people meet, share information, listen to one another even if they disagree. We do our best to be the mediator that brings about peace, unity and reconciliation. Please, help us achieve that.

In conclusion, voicing the plea of your own people and of our member Churches from all over the world I implore you: please, stop the war immediately, ask your soldiers to return to their families and put an end to all hostilities; give a chance to your own people to mourn and bury their dead according to their faith traditions; return to the table of dialogue and solve your own issues through brotherly discussions. I am aware that things are not easy since on each side there are hardliners who want either everything or nothing. Yet, without understanding and compromise which brotherly love brings about, lasting peace cannot be achieved. You can find enough support from the spiritual potential of your faithful people who came to be known and appreciated in the world for their authentic spirituality of humility and love for all.

The First Lady of Ukraine invited me to pay a visit to Kyiv with other spiritual leaders. That would be my dream and I pray for it.

Your faithful people, in their great majority belonging to the Orthodox Church, advance these days though the period of Lent towards the great celebration of Easter. I saw that on such occasions you have also joined your people in their joyful celebrations.

I was always impressed by how your people celebrate that Great Feast. On Easter night, there is a special Orthodox hymn which in the tradition of your people has a special resonance and expression: "This is the day of resurrection. Let us be illumined by the feast. Let us embrace each other. Let us call as "brothers" even those that hate us, and forgive all by the resurrection, and so let us cry: Christ is risen from the dead, trampling down death by death, and upon those in the tombs bestowing life".

When this hymn is being sung, the bells of churches are ringing, and all people embrace, kiss one another and ask for forgiveness.

I would love to celebrate with both of you this year the Feast of Easter in Kyiv; to embrace one another, to ask for forgiveness', to affirm a long lasting peace, of support and respect of one another.

Together with all your faithful people, I pray that God sends upon you the power of His Holy Spirit, to melt, change and heat your hearts with the flame of His love and that for one another.

With deep respect and consideration,



Rev. Prof. Dr Ioan Saucă  
Acting General Secretary  
World Council of Churches