



## Continued solidarity with the people of Ukraine

### *Statement by the Secretaries General of the European Justice and Peace Commissions*

The Secretaries General of the European Justice and Peace Commissions met in Berlin between the 9th and 11th February, as an alternative to the scheduled place of Lviv, which was not considered safe enough due to the ongoing war in Ukraine. In Berlin, we listened to refugees from Ukraine and to organisations supporting them. On Saturday evening we prayed for peace in front of the Russian embassy and on Sunday, we celebrated the Holy Eucharist together with the local Ukrainian Greek-Catholic parish. The unprovoked Russian full-scale invasion of Ukraine, including bombing terror against the civilian population, war crimes and brutal occupation, has forced over 6 million people to leave their homeland and seek refuge abroad. Moreover, 3.6 million people have been displaced internally.

So far, the hope of the refugees to return to a liberated homeland has remained unfulfilled. Two years after the further escalation of the war, the Russian Federation has not stopped inflicting suffering and death on the Ukrainian population. We are aware that the greatest sacrifice is nevertheless being made by the people of Ukraine. They are risking their lives also for the freedom and security of the rest of Europe. With this in mind, we have a moral duty to expand our aid to them in order to protect their lives.<sup>1</sup> We greatly welcome the decision of the European Council to open negotiations with Ukraine on EU membership. We hope that this process will also lead to strengthened cultural, economic and personal relations.

We as Christians and also as Europeans are called upon to practice continued solidarity. We are called upon to show empathy and understanding towards the Ukrainian people, including refugees, who are in constant fear for their loved ones, who have been left behind in Ukraine and whose lives, dignity and freedom are threatened.

Disinformation peddlers are trying to divide our societies. In their propaganda, they play off different groups of people in need against each other. They use the backdrop of Europe-wide increases in costs of living as a result of the war<sup>2</sup> in an attempt to break solidarity with the victims of the Russian aggression. As Christians, we are called upon to take a firm stand against such agitation, which is in stark contrast to Catholic social teaching. No form of ethnocentric nationalism and racism is ever compatible with Christian values.

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.juspax-eu.org/en/dokumente/220515-Statement-of-JP-Europe-on-War-in-Ukraine.pdf>.

<sup>2</sup> On the issue of dealing constructively with fears and concerns, see also the Concerted Action of Justice and Peace Europe 2023/2024: [http://www.juspax-eu.org/de/home/index\\_include.php?includeDocument=Concerted-Action-2023-2024.php](http://www.juspax-eu.org/de/home/index_include.php?includeDocument=Concerted-Action-2023-2024.php).

Our Christian values require us to love all. As Pope Francis puts it in his encyclical Fratelli Tutti, “Love does not care if a brother or sister in need comes from one place or another. For “love shatters the chains that keep us isolated and separate; in their place, it builds bridges. Love enables us to create one great family, where all of us can feel at home... Love exudes compassion and dignity”. We are called upon to create a framework that enables refugees - not only from Ukraine - to live a life that allows them at least a certain degree of normality and integration into the host society. This requires sufficient psychosocial support, the opportunity to participate in community life and to access the labour market.

Our appreciation goes to the many volunteers and full-time helpers who are fully committed to supporting refugees. Such energetic commitment must be encouraged and supported.

Our deepest respect goes to the many efforts undertaken by refugees themselves. Despite the enormous psychological strain caused by the war and the concern for their loved ones, many of the refugees endeavour to learn the language of their host country. They support the economy of the host countries through their labour and establish contacts with the local population. This should not only be encouraged, but also appreciated.

All available diplomatic means at the level of multilateral cooperation must be used to increase the pressure on the Russian Federation to end the bloodshed and suffering and to put an immediate end to its attacks on the foundations of international law, human rights and the international peace order.

We sincerely implore our partners on other continents to reach out to their governments and advocate paving the way for peace and justice through diplomatic pressure on the Russian Federation and a clear rejection of the regime's imperial ambitions.

Truth and justice are the prerequisites for sustainable peace.<sup>3</sup> In this sense, the way we deal with refugees also determines the chances of peace and reconciliation. Working with refugees and victims of war is also work for peace.

Berlin, 11th of February 2024

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<sup>3</sup> <http://www.juspax-eu.org/en/dokumente/221210-Statement-HRD-EN.pdf>.