

Dear Father Ioan!

I'm writing to you not as the First lady - 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.

Do you know what's the worst, though? That there are so many victims who started turning to statistics. We were able to mourn the first victims by names, but now we mourn them by the numbers. The attacker no longer pretends not to want to hit civilian objects - he is purposefully targeting them. Photographs of the maternity hospital in Mariupol bombed by Russians flew worldwide. One of the mothers and her child there during the attack died as I was writing these lines.

Last week we were shocked by the number of murdered children - that number was close to 30. Now that number went over 100 - more than one hundred killed children! Some were shot at military posts along with their parents; others were cut to death by shell fragments or were buried under their own destroyed homes, exhausted by malnutrition, dehydration, and lack of medical care. They are now in temporary graves in their backyards or... in mass graves.

Yes, mass graves have appeared in Ukraine in these two weeks. Living in the XXI century, my hand refuses to write this, and the eyes refuse to read. I will have to use the numbers again, but there is a life of a unique human behind each one. More than two thousand dead - someone's parents, mothers, grandparents, children - lie in these graves in Mariupol. The other day, Pope Francis called it a "martyred" city. It is covered with blood and tears under constant fire.

But there are many similar "martyred cities" in Ukraine - Sumy, Okhtyrka, Kharkiv, Mykolaiv, Bucha, Gostomel, Vorzel, Chernihiv, Izyum, Volnovakha...

It is horrifying to read the messages of Ukrainians on social media, searching in vain for their loved ones who have disappeared in these cities. "The last time my sister (brother, mother) called from the basement ten days ago" is how the messages begin. Enemy forces cut off these cities from any help and opportunity to get out. So thousands of Ukrainians are comforting themselves that their loved one is just in the basement without a connection. Everyone prays for them to be alive and finally pick up the phone!

Today, our primary goal is for these people to finally pick up the phone, eat hot food, and receive the necessary treatment. But the enemy regularly thwarts our tries to create "roads of life." People who walk miles from the occupied cities on foot, carrying children, the elderly, and animals, are shot in the backs. That's how six adults and a child died the other day while trying to enter the village of Peremoha in the Kyiv region.

I address you as an organization dedicated to preaching peace and brotherhood: be the voice of those who suffer from war today! Communicate to the World Council of Churches members the importance of professing justice and peace in our land that goes from faith in God.

May the World Council of Churches be the voice of Ukrainians persecuted by the war. First of all, I ask the members of the WCC to become mediators in organizing real humanitarian corridors! Encourage the organizations they depend on to stand up to this work and not watch from the sidelines!

This letter represents the pain not only for the people but also for everything built with their hands that the enemy is deliberately destroying. These actions directly contradict the concept of social justice, the proclamation, and implementation, which is one of the main tasks for your organization. Instead of flourishing cities and villages, the Russian aggressor leaves the wasteland. Every destroyed building, every city ran over by a tank is someone's house. But it's also someone's memories, hopes, plans, someone's place of strength.

Several million Ukrainians have already lost such a place. You can meet our people on the streets of multiple European cities. You can see the perplexity in their eyes because one thing they crave the most is to be at home with their families.

Knowing about the experience of the World Council of Churches in resolving humanitarian crises, we ask you to help, in particular through affiliated agencies, to help Ukraine and Ukrainians who are currently fleeing the war.

I ask you and the members of the WCC to convey your prophetic voice condemning the war and protecting the civilian population.

And we - those who remain - will fight to make it happen. We will also fight for the salvation of every Ukrainian because it is the people that comprise the country. I ask you to be our moral and active ally in this.

I ask you to continue telling the world the truth about this war, which is taking place just at the doorstep of Europe and can break into another European home at any moment. This calamity now affects everyone wherever he lives - and your colossal authority helps bring this truth to the world.

With faith and hope for peace, and with love that will surely win over death –

Olena Zelenska

