



April 24 – Pope Francis’s Special Collection for Ukraine

To help alleviate the suffering of those affected by the continuing armed conflict in Ukraine, **Pope Francis recently called for a special collection to be held Sunday, April 24 in Catholic churches** throughout Europe. The Holy Father stated that the collection was a "gesture of charity, one that apart from alleviating material suffering, shows my personal closeness as well as that of the entire Church" to the people of Ukraine.

The Pontiff’s call for compassion comes at a time of deep turmoil in Ukraine. For the past two years, the armed conflict between Ukrainian government forces and forces of the Russian Federation and Russian-backed insurgents in eastern Ukraine, as well as Russia’s occupation of Crimea in 2014, have resulted in a huge population of internally displaced persons (IDPs); in the deaths of thousands of soldiers, leaving behind widows with children; in a profound rise in the number of

permanently disabled, wounded, destitute people; and in the creation of life-threatening burdens on the elderly and orphans who, without the resources to escape, remain trapped in zones of conflict. **9,208 Ukrainian civilians and soldiers have been killed, and 21,044 injured as a direct result of the war** in Ukraine's eastern regions and the occupation of Crimea.

The humanitarian crisis includes an additional several million people who live in the conflict zone and are subjected to a demolished infrastructure, lack of basic services, and remain at-risk for mortar attacks and strafing. In March, the treatment station that provides water to 300,000 people in the conflict zone city of Donetsk stopped operations, when the staff was forced to evacuate because of shelling. A greater humanitarian crisis was averted after four days of intense negotiations led by OSCE that ensured water was restored.

Fleeing the zone of conflict, hundreds of thousands of IDPs have found refuge within Ukraine. However, hundreds of thousands of others continue to live in areas on the periphery of the conflict zone in destitute circumstances.

Barbara Manzi, Head of the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UN OCHA) in Ukraine, stated, **“There is a humanitarian crisis in Ukraine: 3.1 million people who live both inside and outside the zones of conflict are in need of life-saving assistance. But this crisis is not visible. There are no mass camps like in other countries.”**

In Ukraine, the IDPs are quietly, but desperately, dispersed. Ukraine ranks 8th in the world in highest number of IDPs, yet this is **the least financed international crisis**. In the report *Ukraine: Humanitarian Plan, January-December 2016*, the United Nations states that **\$298 million (266 million Euro) is needed this year to alleviate the crisis**. “Two years into the conflict, affected women, girls, boys, and men of all ages are struggling to cope. The cumulative impact of psychological trauma, the disruption to education, the daily risk of injury due to insecurity, landmines or other explosive, remnants of war, inadequate shelter, inability to work, and limitations of freedom of movement - all result in a high level of humanitarian and protection needs.”

During his appeal, **Pope Francis highlighted the tragedy of millions in Ukraine**: “I am thinking of the ordeal of those who suffer the consequences of the violence in Ukraine: of those who continue to live in lands that are overturned by hostilities that have caused thousands of deaths, and of those – more than a million – who have been forced to leave due to the grave situation that persists.”



Bishop Borys Gudziak of Paris, head of External Relations for the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church, during an interview with Vatican Radio, said the Pope's announcement of this special collection **“has great material significance, but even more moral significance.”**

The Pope's decision to appeal for help and for peace in Ukraine is a natural extension of the current Jubilee Year of Mercy, noted Bishop Gudziak.

“Tens of thousands have been maimed or injured: are without legs, without arms, without eyes, paralyzed. Hundreds of thousands suffer with post-traumatic shock,” he added.

Of particular concern, he said, is that in the conflict zone, without regular access to food, hunger has

become a persistent problem, especially for the elderly. “After two years of this stealth war, a war that is undeclared but real, people are exhausted. There is a lack of medicine, lack of insulin, lack of vaccines. In affected areas, operations proceed without any anesthesia. People have become homeless, lost their families, lost their possessions. There is deep psychological trauma.”

With the support of international Caritas network and other international organizations, Caritas Ukraine has been at the forefront of providing assistance to those most affected by the conflict, but the needs far outweigh currently available resources. “Despite the extraordinary solidarity and cooperation within Ukrainian society, the dimensions of this humanitarian crisis are too



overwhelming for Ukrainians to respond to these needs on their own, which is why the Papal appeal to the European Community is so crucially important. **Ukraine needs the solidarity and compassion of all people of good will in Europe and the World. Please help Ukraine to overcome this humanitarian crisis”, noted Andrij Waskowycz, President of Caritas Ukraine.**

His Beatitude Sviatoslav Shevchuk, Major Archbishop of the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church, commented: “It is crucial and prophetic that our Holly Father has broken the silence in Europe around the war in Ukraine. He has become the voice of those who suffer in Ukraine.” Explaining the humanitarian action that will follow this collection, His Beatitude emphasized that the assistance will be provided to all who are suffering the consequences of the war, irrespectively of language, nationality or religion.