

# STATEMENT ON THE FIRST ANNIVERSARY OF THE WAR IN UKRAINE

23 February 2023

*“Let us look at all those civilians whose killing was considered ‘collateral damage.’ Let us ask the victims themselves. Let us think of the refugees and displaced... the mothers who lost their children, and the boys and girls maimed or deprived of their childhood. Let us hear the true stories...look at reality through their eyes...In this way, we will be able to grasp the abyss of evil at the heart of war. Nor will it trouble us to be deemed naive for choosing peace.” - Pope Francis, Fratelli Tutti, 2020, par. 261.*

One year after the Russian invasion of Ukraine, Pax Christi International expresses our deep concern for countless victims of a war that has led to death, injury, displacement, trauma, and ecological harm. This war has generated almost 6 million internally displaced persons and 8 million refugees; killed more than 7,200 civilians including over 400 children and hundreds of thousands of soldiers; and caused generational trauma.

The war of aggression against Ukraine has clearly demonstrated that no international authority exists with sufficient wisdom to effectively address the root causes or with adequate means to have prevented Russia’s brutal invasion. International law provides every sovereign nation with the right to self-defense. In a world of highly destructive weapons, armed self-defense may trigger an escalation to extremes that can even lead to a nuclear war.

For this reason, Pax Christi International urgently calls on the international community to immediately facilitate diplomatic initiatives to restore the international order and the territorial integrity of Ukraine. We plead with Russia and Ukraine to enter negotiations directly, on neutral ground, and with a mutually agreeable mediator.

Insufficient investment in developing and scaling up proven effective nonviolent strategies for defense, including civilian based defense, has created the impression that self-defense is only and always armed. Many Ukrainians are demonstrating clearly and with great courage, however, that nonviolent defense can be very effective and could be much more readily available with significant investment in resources, training, and research.

Pax Christi International calls on the international community to invest in developing nonviolent strategies for defense and just peace.

As a human rights and peace movement, Pax Christi International advocates for the right of conscientious objection for soldiers and civilians on both sides of the conflict. We call for sufficient independence for media, political opposition parties, and civil society in Russia; we highly value the many forms of nonviolent resistance to the war by Russian society; and we support all Russians who protest against the war, risking arrest and imprisonment.

This war also shows the immorality of the possession of nuclear weapons and the urgent need for nuclear abolition. President Putin's threat to use nuclear weapons in Ukraine reminded the world that a single nuclear bomb detonated could create a humanitarian disaster of unparalleled proportions. A full-scale nuclear war would spell the end of human civilization as we know it. Pax Christi International calls on all States to delegitimize these weapons and strengthen the legal norm against their use by signing and ratifying the Treaty for the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons.

Pax Christi International also urges a Human Security approach in Europe and in the world. Russia should be included, as well as Belarus and Ukraine, in a broader security concept based on trust building and collective security, oriented by a just peace framework. A Human Security approach also recognizes with UN SCR1325 that peace and security efforts will be more sustainable if women take part in the prevention of violence, the delivery of relief, trauma healing, and recovery efforts for lasting peace.

The need for people-to-people peace processes that involve dialogue between the Ukrainian and Russian peoples, including women and youth, are important to the prevention and transformation of violent conflict. Pax Christi International supports initiatives that allow contact, cooperation, and healing.

Pax Christi International is a movement for reconciliation and active nonviolence, founded at the end of the Second World War with a deep belief in the possibility of just peace. We are painfully aware that war is not limited to Ukraine; that violence is endemic in many corners of the world; that a new logic of peace and nonviolence is urgently needed.

We call Pax Christi members and all people of good will to pray and to mobilize for peace, urging States to address the relationship between human security, care for creation, human dignity, and sustainable peace and to advocate urgently for dialogue.

*“The Russian invasion of Ukraine is inflicting untold suffering on the Ukrainian people, with profound global implications. The prospects for peace keep diminishing. The chances of further escalation and bloodshed keep growing. I fear the world is not sleepwalking into a wider war.*

*I fear it is doing so with its eyes wide open.”*

*UN Secretary General **Antonio Guterres** (6 February 2023)*

If we want to reap the harvest of peace and justice in the future,  
we will have to sow seeds of nonviolence here and now, in the present.”

**Mairead Maguire** | *Irish Peace Activist and Nobel Peace Laureate*

