

Article 17 TFEU

Dialogue with churches, religious associations or communities, philosophical and non-confessional organisations



Article 17 dialogue on the humanitarian response to the war in Ukraine



Tuesday 12 July 2022

13:00 > 16:00 @ Spaak 7C50

Statement by Msgr. Robert J. Vitillo, Secretary General
of the International Catholic Migration Commission and
Convenor of the Catholic Response for Ukraine Working Group

Your Excellencies, the President of the European Parliament, Officers of European Parliament and of the European Commission, distinguished Parliamentarians, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Please accept my expression of profound gratitude for extending an invitation to share with you today the commitment and active engagement of both the leadership and the faithful people of the Catholic Church in the humanitarian response to the war in Ukraine. Pope Francis has been tireless in calling attention to the senseless harm caused by war and the need to provide both humanitarian assistance and spiritual care to those affected by this war. In fact, between 27 February and 10 July 2022, he has made 64 public appeals regarding the tragic situation in Ukraine.

While the greatest burden of protection and care for those affected has been delivered at the local level of diocesan and parish-based structures,

these services have been supported and strengthened by Catholic-inspired global, regional, and national organizations through the provision of funding, material goods, and professional expertise coming from every region of the world.

In early March, the leaders of global and European regional Catholic-inspired organizations formed a Working Group calling itself “The Catholic Response for Ukraine”. Since that time, representatives of Caritas, Jesuit Refugee Service, International Catholic Migration Commission, the Sovereign Order of Malta, Depaul International, the Knights of Columbus and Stella Maris, with the Council of Bishops’ Conferences of Europe and the Commission of the Bishops’ Conferences of the European Union countries have participated in regular meetings and remain committed to address ongoing gaps and needs identified by the local actors in Ukraine and in surrounding host countries.

But no activity report could ever hope to communicate the lessons that I have learned during my visit to Poland and Ukraine last week. My “teachers” were the displaced persons and refugees themselves as well as the Catholic bishops, priests, Religious Sisters and Brothers, and the faithful laypersons who are laboring, day and night, in the Catholic churches, seminaries, convents, monasteries and schools as well as in private homes and local government buildings to offer comfort and build resilience among those millions of Ukrainians who have lost their limbs, are nursing multiple physical, emotional, and spiritual wounds, and are deeply grieving the loss of life and of property in so many parts of Ukraine that have been subjected to such terrible violence.

Without exception, the recipients of such services expressed profound gratitude for the gentle care they have received. One woman pointed out that food and shelter was not enough since they also needed to ease their hearts, minds, and souls and that they had found much loving care at the seminary where she had sought protection.

In the area of advocacy, many of our respective Working Group members joined other faith-inspired organizations to issue a *Statement on the arrival of refugees from Ukraine and the application of the Temporary Protection Directive*, welcoming the urgent decision made by the European Council in March 2022, as well as the mobilisation and flexibility of EU funding to be allocated towards the needs of Ukrainian refugees, and urging that *all persons leaving Ukraine in need of protection should be allowed to avail themselves of it – irrespective of their origin, colour of skin ... or residence status.*"

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On 17 June 2022, the Commission of Catholic Bishops' Conferences of the European Union (COMECE) called on European leaders "not to cease their efforts for an end of the war, with a free, secure and independent Ukraine in its internationally recognized borders ... [and] to implement a credible EU enlargement process."²

I will conclude with one of Pope Francis' often-repeated appeals for more focused and direct efforts at peacebuilding to end the human suffering and loss of life in Ukraine and in many other parts of the world:

¹ <https://reliefweb.int/report/moldova/statement-arrival-refugees-ukraine-and-application-temporary-protection-directive>, 23 March 2022.

² <https://www.comece.eu/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2022/06/2022-06-17-Statement-Background-Peace-EXTERN.pdf>

“The world needs peace. Not a peace based on the balance of weapons, on mutual fear. No, that will not do. This means turning history back seventy years. The Ukrainian crisis should have been, but – if there is the will – can still become a challenge for wise statespersons, capable of building, with dialogue, a better world for the new generations. With God’s help, this is always possible! But it is necessary to pass from the strategies of political, economic and military power to a plan for global peace: no to a world divided between conflicting powers; yes to a world united between peoples and civilizations that respect each other.”³

³ Message of Pope Francis, 3 July 2022, St. Peter’s Square, Vatican City,
<https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/angelus/2022/documents/20220703-angelus.html>