



**RESISTING AGGRESSION
WINNING PEACE
SUPPORTING THE VICTIMS**

**Declaration of the German Bishops' Conference
on the war in Ukraine**

Ukraine is living through dramatic days: days of war, days of human suffering. Soldiers on both side of the front are killed and wounded. Many civilians are also among the victims as homes, schools and hospitals are hit by bombs and missiles. In defiance of all the rules of constraining acts of war, civilian casualties are accepted, very probably even deliberately brought about to intimidate and demoralise the population. Already in the few days that this war has lasted, thousands of people have died. Countless more have mourned the death of loved ones, lost their belongings and been deprived of life chances. Many have suffered traumas from which it will take them a very long time to recover. Probably more than two million people have already fled abroad. The trail of destruction that the war has cut in a very short time is huge.

An entire country is in shock and is experiencing fear. But at the same time, the inhabitants are showing a fighting spirit and perseverance that many abroad had not expected given the overwhelming superiority of the Russian military. This may be the courage of desperation but it is also the courage of a people who are outraged by the injustice done to them and do not want to be deprived of their rights without a fight. Their courage deserves respect and high esteem.

Again and again, Ukrainians point out that their country has been at war since 2014. In fact, the Russian Federation broke the peace at that time with the annexation of Crimea and the so-called "hybrid" acts of war in the eastern Ukrainian regions around Luhansk and Donetsk. But the invasion that began on 24 February 2022 is of a different kind. It is turning the whole of Ukraine into a war zone. We deplore the invasion of an internationally recognised country, a war of aggression that violates the ban on the use of force enshrined in the United Nations Charter - and was therefore rightly condemned by a large majority of the UN General Assembly.

The justifications put forward by the Russian government are all unconvincing, even if one is prepared to recognise Russian security needs in principle. The

Editor
Dr Beate Gilles
General Secretary of the German
Bishops' Conference

Editorial
Matthias Kopp (responsible.)
Director of the
Communications Office

Kaiserstraße 161
53113 Bonn
Tel. +49 (0) 228 103 214
Fax +49 (0) 228 103 254
Mail pressestelle@dbk.de

dbk.de
facebook.com/dbk.de
twitter.com/dbk_online
youtube.com/c/DeutscheBischofskonferenz

invaders' plans are not known in detail. What is indisputable is that the democratically elected government of Ukraine is to be overthrown and the whole country subjected to the Kremlin's will. Ukraine's ties to the European Union are to be radically weakened or severed altogether. We unreservedly condemn the Russian invasion of Ukraine. If it is not to lead to further devastation in the country and to uncertain times as regards international relations, the war must end immediately and the foreign troops must return home.

It is not only the Ukrainians who are in shock. In a sense, this also applies to all other Europeans. For Russia's actions have radically called into question the foundations of coexistence on our continent. The "rule-based order" that politicians and academics talk about has been abandoned, sending Europe down the path of an uncertain future. This also explains why the European states and the other countries of the West have launched a resolute sanctions policy against Russia in the shortest possible time and declared their solidarity with Ukraine. Everyone feels that the invasion of Ukraine is also an attack on Europe and its values. Democracy, civil liberties and the rule of law, a system of coexistence and cooperation between states based on binding and fair rules - all these are despised and fought against by those who want to rob Ukraine of its freedom. Europe is therefore well advised to prepare itself for a long and difficult conflict. An attitude of determination and unambiguity, beyond hysteria and tactical manoeuvring, is necessary to meet this challenge.

In Germany, the supply of weapons to Ukraine has been and continues to be the subject of intense debate, sometimes even passionate argument. This is quite understandable in view of our history and the consequences we have drawn from it. The debate is also being held in the churches. Indeed, their representatives have always considered it their task to accompany the export of armaments with a critical eye and to call for a restrictive licensing practice (with the exception of arms transfers to NATO partners and to states of equal status). This will remain the case, because we know that the (all too often careless and not infrequently profit-driven) provision of violent means expands the actual possibilities for the use of violence. Nonetheless, the decision whether to provide weapons must not disregard the concrete situation. We therefore consider arms deliveries to Ukraine, which serve to enable the country under attack to exercise its right to self-defence, guaranteed under international law and also affirmed by the Church's peace ethic, to be legitimate in principle. However, it is up to those who have to make the decision to consider precisely what they are doing and what they may cause by their actions. This applies equally to the proponents and opponents of arms deliveries.

With reference to the changed security situation in Europe, the German government has initiated a stronger orientation of the Bundeswehr (German armed forces) towards their task of national and alliance defence and a better equipment of the armed forces. These goals are fundamentally plausible and should not be generally associated with political fighting terms such as "rearmament policy" or "militarisation of foreign policy". However, especially in view of the considerable financial resources called for in the reorientation of security policy, it must be remembered that Germany's contribution to peace in the world encompasses many tasks that

must not be pushed into the background. Not least among these are the improvement of living conditions in poor countries and a resolute climate policy, the absence of which would not only endanger life in some regions of our planet but would also, and precisely for that reason, have concrete security policy implications. Some Bundeswehr missions abroad also remain necessary for the sake of peace. Those who have to face new peace challenges must not forget the old ones.

In her teaching and in her actions, the Church is committed to the non-violence practised by Jesus. Even in the hour of distress, she must therefore resolutely resist the temptation to use violence without limits. Violence and counter-violence, even when legitimate, drive a spiral of violence that regularly causes such violence to get out of control. Violence in war not only causes concrete suffering, but also fuels hatred of the enemy. And a collective consciousness of peoples poisoned by hatred often makes peace impossible for generations, as is shown by many examples in history. That is why the horizon of peace must remain open even in times of war. Even the enemy always remains a human being! Therefore, no one is allowed to incite hostility between the opponents. We are grateful to all those who show sympathy for the victims of the other side. And we feel connected to the many Russians who protest against the war despite state harassment. They inspire hope for reconciliation and a peaceful coexistence of peoples in the future.

All true religion rejects war which is a defeat of humanity. Whoever triggers it deliberately commits a crime before God and man. Completely unacceptable, therefore, are all attempts to give war a religious legitimacy. And the representatives of the churches must beware of allowing themselves to be determined by national loyalties in a way that God's will for peace fades into the background. We are grateful that numerous bishops and priests from the Orthodox and Catholic churches are addressing their faithful in a good Christian spirit. We are particularly touched by the voices of clergy of the Russian Orthodox Church condemning the war against Ukraine and urging peace. We call on the Patriarch of this Church to speak a clear word on his part and to explicitly distance himself from the war. The world needs the common witness of the churches, especially in times of distress and upheaval. These are also times for taking decisions.

Help for the victims of the war is urgently needed. Already, many people in this country are doing exemplary work and testifying to humanity in the face of the inhumanity of war. The German relief organisations report that the willingness to donate is currently at a level rarely seen before in international crises. The German Catholic relief organisations - such as Caritas international and Renovabis, an “action of solidarity of German Catholics with the people of Central and Eastern Europe” - are also providing their services to the people in Ukraine and its neighbouring countries with proven professionalism. They ensure that the many individual contributions of solidarity reach those in need, who often lack the basic necessities for life and survival. Special mention should also be made of the bishops, priests and lay people of the

Ukrainian Greek Catholic and Roman Catholic Churches in Ukraine, who are providing pastoral care and charitable assistance to people in need in an outstanding way.

Today, we bishops call on the Catholic faithful in our country to keep on donating generously to alleviate the hardship in Ukraine. In this way you will help to ensure that human dignity is upheld even under the worst conditions. It is precisely through practical help that the victims of the war are shown that they are not left alone in their fate.

Special attention must be paid to refugees, whether they are looking for a safer place in Ukraine or heading abroad. It is important that the European Union creates the legal prerequisites for an admission in the member states that is for the most part unbureaucratic. Germany is also seeking flexible regulations. Above all, we are impressed by the warm-hearted willingness to accommodate and care for refugees in Ukraine's neighbouring states. In standing up together for the refugees, the stranded by war, Europe can and must translate its common values into concrete reality. By doing this, we also defend our European identity.

In recent years, Germany has helped many refugees and people displaced by the wars in the Near and Middle East. This would not have been possible without the commitment of the many volunteers in the Christian congregations who have set a convincing example of charity. So, we are full of hope that the Christians in our country will once again prove and distinguish themselves, this time in service to the refugees from Ukraine. We thank all those who are already active or who are ready to commit themselves following their faith.

Many Christians have responded to the call of the German Bishops' Conference, the Evangelical Church in Germany and the Association of Christian Churches (ACK) to pray in their congregations for peace and for the people in Ukraine. Let us not cease praying! Let us ask God, who holds the fate of the world in His hands, for peace for Ukraine and for all places on earth without peace.