
War in Ukraine. Buonomo (Lateran University): "The UN lacks concrete action, it must be conceived anew"

"I do believe that the Pope's words address not only the reality of the situation. In fact the UN is now virtually incapable of taking concrete actions with regard to the conflict in Ukraine - which is different from all the other wars of the recent past. At the same time, it is also a cry for a new way of conceiving the United Nations compared to the way it is today. Indeed, the original 1945 UN structure is no longer an option." It is the view of the **Rector of the Pontifical Lateran University, Vincenzo Buonomo**, commenting on the words of Pope Francis, who reiterated that we are witnessing "the impotence of the UN". **In your opinion, how should a different UN be structured?** The United Nations was established in 1945 in the wake of the Second World War. This "too" is important. It envisaged not only the participation of certain nations having a different status - the so-called permanent members – it also envisaged response or preventive actions, aimed at guaranteeing security and therefore peace, which today is no longer possible to conceive and implement. This is because warfare has changed. Alliances have changed. Weapons and warfare have become more sophisticated; an increasing number of weapons are unmanned, relying on technology and cyber technology instead. From the political point of view, the UN has paradoxically grown weaker with respect to its fundamental purpose, which is not to resolve conflicts, but to prevent them by acting as a "focal point" for the activities of the States - ranging from disarmament, to arms control, to banishing the law of the strongest. The Pope calls on the UN to be a veritable organ, an authority capable of operating at global level independently of the States and their interests with regard to peacekeeping and justice. But this is not possible with a global weapons budget of some 2,000 billion dollars and a UN ordinary budget that can hardly collect contributions of up to 2 billion. The Pope's conception recurs in many of his speeches, from the one he made on 26 September 2015 at the United Nations to those he delivered at other international forums, including the one in Malta last Saturday.



What do you think should be the next step? Yesterday's debate at the Security Council showed that if the Ukrainian conflict returned to be dealt with within the Organisation, then perhaps it could be handled in a collegial manner, on a broader scale, as opposed to an action that is limited to a clash

not only of positions but also of interests. There are countries which are rightfully supporting Ukraine against Russian aggression, and countries which directly or indirectly support Russia's decision, while others are not taking a position. *This is not a forum that reasons and acts in a unified manner; the UN must become the shared framework.* Its role should not be confined to that of a mouthpiece for the world's problems, rather, it should be a forum for tackling common issues and finding common solutions. This is the necessary step. Crises must be tackled on a global scale. If a few regional entities tackle the crises no successful results will ensue. The direct or indirect impact of this war will ripple through all nations. Let it suffice to note the adverse economic fallout of this war on so many countries, starting with those that are already in a state of precariousness. **What is the role of the smaller nations in this regard?** I think that the function of the smaller nations may well be that of promoting an understanding of the problems that the larger nations face in international relations. Between 1967 and 1975, when what was eventually termed the Helsinki Process started in Cold War Europe, smaller nations successfully created the conditions for what was later known as the Final Act, which not only marked a formal solution to the Second World War, in fact it also paved the way for the gradual changes that were to take place, especially in the countries of Central and Eastern Europe. Small nations have a capacity for manoeuvre that is worth considering. **How must we understand Russia's role in the UN?** Clearly, Russia wants to make use of its position, which is to block any decision the Security Council may take with regard to the conflict in Ukraine. At the same time, the UN cannot do without Russia. *On the international scene, in the negotiations, in diplomatic action, excluding someone means not only keeping them out, but not being able to cooperate with them to resolve issues. No member of the international community can be excluded.* That is not the solution, even if a member country is engaging in wrongdoings. The exclusion of Germany from the League of Nations before the Second World War is a lesson for us. By all means, even a nation breaching the rules must be made to understand its responsibility and cooperate in order to move forward. When the use of weapons in Ukraine will end, another conflict will begin, one directed at restoring peace, which may entail new borders or a different division of territories, the return of displaced populations or refugees abroad, and finally that justice be done for the crimes committed. All parties involved will have to be present to assume their responsibilities and commitments. **There are allegations of international crimes, of Nuremberg-type trials. Is that even possible?** One thing is clear: there is no point in appealing to the International Criminal Court, indeed I would say it is a way of evading responsibility. Paradoxically, the Court is called into play by nations - and there are many of them! - that do not recognise its mission and jurisdiction. It should be remembered that after Nuremberg there was the Tokyo Tribunal, the Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia, for Rwanda, for Cambodia, for Sierra Leone... all the way to the Court. Then why isn't it clearly stated that the juridical culture, which humanity has attained also through these tribunals, requires all States to prosecute perpetrators of international crimes? Including those States whose citizens are accused of international crimes. This is known as 'universal jurisdiction', and yet it is still considered utopian, but only for the purpose of evading responsibility and perhaps to subsequently claim that the International Criminal Court is useless in the face of proven crimes. The underlying rationale is the one so often described by Pope Francis when speaking of war, namely, "it is always the fault of others" and therefore "what should I care?". **What are the prospects for peace in Ukraine?** There seem to be two plausible options. On the one hand, Ukraine must necessarily safeguard its territory and its sovereignty. This means not only safeguarding that country but upholding the principle of the inviolability of borders. An aggression, an external attack must not change the borders of a State, its territorial, cultural and, above all, human integrity. The opposite would amount to challenging all the principles enshrined in international law: with what consequences? The second course of action is for the parties to the conflict to engage in negotiations, albeit with the presence of reliable guarantors. Ukraine has already made the scope for negotiations clear when it spoke of neutrality, of not wanting to join NATO, of acting like other so-called 'neutral' States. The Russian position shows no signs of openness, indeed it insists on some sort of 'unredeemed lands' doctrine. I think these two avenues

should be pursued, but obviously both require a multilateral framework to avoid pragmatic solutions that will only be effective in the short term. *At the same time, Ukraine can be gradually integrated within the European Economic Area.* However, the most important imperative remains, namely: the forthright commitment of those with institutional and political responsibilities, and indeed of all of us who are generating the energy and vitality of institutions, both national and international. We cannot remain spectators nor increase the caravan of the uncaring. For unless the attitude of the decision-makers changes, we may achieve a "ceasefire", but we will not resolve the underlying causes of the conflict.

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