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## Appeal from the Exarch of Odessa: “Help Ukraine to end this war as soon as possible!”

“I renew my appeal to the international community: Help Ukraine to end this war as soon as possible! Do everything you can to prevent it from continuing! Dozens and hundreds of people die every day, not only our fighters, but also peaceful, innocent people! I urge you to support Ukraine to the greatest possible extent. To protect not just Ukraine, but also the whole of Europe!”, said the Greek-Catholic Eparchial bishop of Odessa **Mykhaylo Bubniy**, in a desperate appeal sent out from one of the territories hardest hit by Russian aggression. Speaking to SIR, the bishop provides an “overview” of the situation in his Exarchate. “The situation in our Exarchate has been dramatic since the outbreak of the war in Ukraine. Two of our deaneries in the Kherson region - Kherson and Skadovsk - are still under occupation.” The humanitarian situation in the area - amidst ongoing occupation, shelling and air and land attacks - has been dramatically impacted since the very first days of the war, because everything came to a standstill. People started to leave. Shops and factories were shut down, residents lost all their belongings and their jobs.” There was also “a great fear of the Russian troops, who had occupied Ukrainian territories.” *With no hesitation, the Church decided to remain close to the people. Parishes became humanitarian centres where relief aid was distributed, displaced people were given shelter and warm meals.* The bishop and the priests, working in conjunction with volunteer workers and charities, immediately offered their services. Some remained in the occupied areas. Others left to bring families to safe places and were unable to return “owing to vicious fighting and because parishes had been occupied by Russian troops.” Assistance is thus being provided at a distance, by sending money and food packages. For example, in the city of Beryslav (Kherson region), despite the war, the soup kitchen continued its activity, distributing meals to more than 100 people every day. “The peculiarity of this soup kitchen”, the bishop told us, “is the fact that the church itself has become a ‘refectory’, a place where people come together, pray and eat in the temple.”

**Ukraine is the breadbasket of Europe and Africa. We have been following with concern the situation of vessels loaded with grain stranded at blockaded Odessa's seaport. Have there been any developments? Is there any risk that the grain will spoil with the warm temperatures?** The government and global diplomacy are working hard on this matter and, as far as I know, every effort is being made to solve the problem of grain exports, blockaded at Odessa's seaport, which must be shipped to poorer countries especially. It is a very difficult situation and even the Holy Father sent out an appeal. “Please”, he said, “do not use wheat, a staple food, as a weapon of war.” *This problem must be solved to prevent famine, especially in the poorest countries, if not, a global crisis could ensue.* Let's be honest, the Russian Federation is the cause of this crisis. Only a few days ago, Russian forces destroyed the second-largest grain terminal in Ukraine, in the regional storage site of Nikolaev. Is this not a strategy on the part of Russia, toying with diplomacy, ignoring all international rights and violating all international agreements? Russia is downright blackmailing the global community, using force and aggression, not only against the neighbouring independent State of Ukraine, but also against the whole world. **Do you wish to make an appeal?** First of all, I call on the international community as a whole to take all necessary measures immediately, rapidly, to help Ukraine to end Russia's brutal aggression, the source of this wicked and diabolical hatred against everyone. The Russian Federation had repeatedly declared that it had no intention of waging war and occupying Ukrainian territories. Yet a few days after these declarations, it plunged into war against an independent and democratic State. *Russia is shrewd. It calls this aggression a “special military operation”, but in fact it is waging a full-scale war, wiping Ukrainian towns and villages off the face of the earth.* **Did you expect this would happen?** It was impossible to foresee that this could happen in the 21st century. But as it turns out, nothing is impossible when it comes to the Russian Federation. As we see, this aggression is spreading all over the world, including the grain issue. I would also like to make an appeal to the Holy Father and ask the global

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community, policymakers and diplomats, to make every effort to stop Russia and its aggressive policy against Ukraine and against the world. As I previously mentioned, Russia terms the war with Ukraine a "special operation." This is downright deceitful. They talk about a "special operation" when in fact they intend to strip an independent state of its ability to defend itself, they aim to seize and destroy a nation that is defending itself with its bare hands. The Russian Federation has invaded a sacred realm - a nation with its people, culture, language, traditions, identity and territorial integrity, etc. It is an invasion of the rights and freedoms of people who have the right to live and be citizens.

**Yesterday, Sunday June 12, Pope Francis made yet another appeal from St. Peter's Square. How important are the Holy Father's words?** The Holy Father's words are always extremely important. The Holy Father is a moral authority whose first concern is to implore God's help and exhort the world to stop all forms of violence. Wars are being fought today not only in Ukraine, and the Pope continually calls for reconciliation, for negotiation, because war causes widespread suffering and pain. *We are grateful to the Holy Father for telling the whole world the truth about what is happening in Ukraine, for his prayerful support, for his words calling on the global community to help Ukraine and put an end to this unjust and brutal war.* Many countries have been actively supporting Ukraine since the outbreak of the war with humanitarian aid, taking in refugees, etc. Indeed, the Holy Father's pleas for reconciliation and for an end to the war are of great importance. As a bishop, with a part of the Exarchate in the occupied territories, I call on the international community to start negotiations as soon as possible - but not on the conditions of the aggressor who started this war! My first request is a ceasefire and a solution to the global food crisis! Ukraine is a European country that is defending authentic democracy and freedom for the whole of Europe and for the rest of the world today. With its sacrifice and courage, Ukraine has raised a shield that protects Europe and the rest of the world against aggression, dictatorship and violence, which, unfortunately, are being wrought by the Russian Federation. Let us not stop praying and let us make every effort for peace! Together we pray to God to pour His power onto us to help us solve these problems. May the Lord help us in this, and may the Blessed Virgin Mary take under her motherly protection the long-suffering Ukrainian people, especially our defenders and our government.

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