

## Celebrations, music, and humanitarian assistance. The city of Mykolaiv comes back to life



) Residents welcome the vans of the #StopTheWarNow caravan in the square of a suburban district of Mykolaiv. The weather is cold. It just finished raining. But everyone is very curious. Even some children are there: they climbed the iron structure of a swing to get a good view of what is happening. Within some 20 or so minutes, microphones and amplifiers are installed on one side of the square. There is music and songs. For one afternoon, the gloomy atmosphere of war is stripped from the city that finally resumes its normality. The atmosphere warms up. The crowds start cheering and clapping their hands. They start dancing. The rain has unfortunately made the streets slippery and muddy. But today, nobody worries about that. Today, people don't want to think of how difficult their life has become. Very few smiles are to be seen. But this is a festive afternoon. And while the music continues playing on the small improvised stage, volunteers unload parcels with humanitarian aid from the vans. Elderly women, many of them with impaired mobility, draw near, line up in an orderly manner, give their names and take their blue parcels full of pasta, rice, various foodstuffs.



president of FOCSIV (Federation of International Christian-inspired Voluntary Service Organisations), which forms part of the StopTheWarNow network together with 180 other movements and associations, on behalf of everyone. "It is a perfectly natural gesture of solidarity, we are sure that in an identical and opposite situation you would do the same for us. We are here to say to each other that we are brothers and sisters, we are neighbours. It is a small and symbolic act compared to the realities we represent. A part of the Italian community is near you, condemning the Russian aggression and struggling to fight for peace. We call on politicians and institutions to take diplomatic steps for peace. We will pursue this commitment when we return to Italy, you will be with us in our hearts."



Countless stories intersect in the square. Some people came all the way from Kherson, where the Russians destroyed everything, where living is impossible today. "We are safe here," a man says. A little girl is standing next to him. His wife works in the army, he lost his job as a dockworker and is fully dedicated to looking after their daughter. Irina and Nicolaiv are fluent in Italian because they worked in Italy for 20 years. They decided to return to Mykolaiv two years ago. It seemed the crowning achievement after a life of sacrifices. But then the war broke out and on March 6 last year they returned to Italy where they joined their daughter in Lecco. They returned here in September. "We are managing to get by quite well thanks to our pension," Irina says, "but there is a shortage of jobs here, all the men have left and the women are alone with the children. I don't know how they manage to get by. There is no food. There is a shortage of drinking water. The schools have not yet reopened." Residents are expecting that at least the university, hit by missiles, the bomb-damaged schools and kindergartens will be rebuilt as soon as possible. It is their hope in the resumption of normal life. What is the atmosphere like in the city? "We are angry - the woman replies -. I speak Russian. Before the war we were two brotherly nations. We are still struggling to understand why the Russians did this to us. We listened to the stories of people who used to live in Bucha and Izyum. They told us what they saw. They found bodies in mass graves with their hands tied. The Russians killed, raped women and children. There are widespread feelings of anger over this."

