

## Ukraine. Msgr. Yazlovetskiy (Caritas-Spes): "The war is not over. Do not forget us"



. auxiliary bishop of the diocese of Kyiv-Zhytomyr, President of Caritas-Spes, is currently in Rome to attend the General Assembly of Caritas Internationalis. Contacted by SIR, he described the current situation in Ukraine, as the bombings and armed attacks have intensified. Over the past 24 hours, the south-eastern region of Zaporizhzhia, home to Europe's largest nuclear power plant, has been bombed more than 70 times. What is deemed the 'fiercest battle' is being fought near Bakhmut, where Ukrainian Defence Forces are keeping track of every kilometre of land liberated from Russian control. On May 9, while Victory Day was being celebrated in Russia, marking Adolf Hitler's Germany's capitulation to the Allied Forces, a spate of air strikes, involving drones and missiles, hit the capital and other cities in Ukraine. Bishop Yazlovetskiy told SIR that after the winter months of extreme cold and below-zero temperatures, Spring is at last arriving in Ukraine, but "sadly, everything reminds us of the war. Military vehicles line the streets, soldiers are everywhere. These days the Russians have reminded us that no place is safe." **Your Excellency, what is the situation with regard to Caritas relief actions?** We are carrying out various projects as Caritas Spes and Caritas Ukraine, in line with the suggestions we receive from our benefactors. In fact, there are numerous meetings and many representatives of organisations visit us in person to show us their projects and initiatives, and to discuss our needs. Thus there are those who are helping us rebuild houses or residential flats that have been severely damaged in this year of war, with the objective of allowing people to return to their homes. Some of our projects include the family-by-family distribution of parcels with humanitarian aid. Most of these are refugee families, very large families. Finally, Caritas pursues what it has consistently been doing since the outbreak of this aggression, namely distributing food parcels to the population. Unfortunately, there are more poor people now than there used to be, standing in long lines at the various centres for a warm meal. We are hosting the refugees. Many families have been accommodated in church buildings. In many cases, we don't even know what to

do with them because they have nowhere to return to.



We are trying to drive to these areas with minibuses bearing Caritas logos, packed with basic necessities. We try to get as close as possible to the front line and reach the villages liberated by our soldiers. The Russians have left these territories utterly destroyed, torched even, with no infrastructure. It will take time before rebuilding is possible and before we will see a semblance of normality. In the meantime, our relief workers are trying - as far as possible and as safely as possible - to go there to help people who were left isolated for a long time and are in need of everything. **Do you have any news of the soldiers?** Caritas is likewise helping our soldiers who return from the battlefield and the families of those who are still fighting. Many of them are wounded when they return, and can no longer engage in the fighting. They also need psychological support to deal with the traumas of war. **How have the Ukrainian people changed in this year and a half of war?** What I am seeing with much gratitude, but also surprise, is that despite this war, their faith has not been lost. People go to church. They have not drifted away from our communities. Even though large numbers of people, including Catholics, have left the country, the churches are never empty. New people have arrived, even those who had never before attended church services. Many priests have been telling us: "there is no shortage of people, people have been coming, with a desire to pray." This is a reason for great hope. Moreover, while the war inflicted all sorts of serious wounds, this ordeal has united us as a people and as a country.



In my time working for Caritas, I discovered how big and beautiful this organisation is. It's like a large family where no one is left alone. Those in need are immediately welcomed and helped by the other members. We saw this also in Ukraine. Representatives of the national Caritas agencies have also travelled to Kyiv to verify the situation on the ground and the related necessities, thereby carrying out a concrete, constant commitment, which is very important for us. We are extremely grateful for this inflow of help and support, for everything that the various Caritas agencies have been doing for us, for our country and for the Ukrainians who were forced to flee their hometowns. It makes us feel that we're not alone, that we have not been abandoned. For us, this concern shown by the entire universal Catholic Church, manifested through Caritas, is a sign of communion that permits us to look ahead in a spirit of hope. **Here in Italy, there's a risk that people might start getting used to the Ukrainian crisis.** It also happens here, when we are not being bombed. It's easy to forget that we're at war. So, yes, there is that risk. But the fact is that unfortunately the problem has not been solved. The war is not over. Please don't forget us. Please keep praying for us, that this aggression may end, and that it may end as soon as possible. We have already accomplished so much, also thanks to your help and your prayers. But the war must end.

M. Chiara Biagioni