



AUSTRALIAN CATHOLIC BISHOPS CONFERENCE

Bishops call for peace in Ukraine, generous Australian response

MEDIA RELEASE

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Australian Catholic Bishops Conference president Archbishop Mark Coleridge has expressed indignation at what is happening in Ukraine and called for a rejection of the madness of war and a return to reason, saying “the peace of the world is at stake”.

“We express our deep compassion for the people of Ukraine and our solidarity with all people of Ukrainian heritage here in Australia,” Archbishop Coleridge said.

“It’s not enough to condemn the bloodshed, breathe threats and take half-measures. The entire international community – including Australia – needs to do all in its power to stop the violence.

“This isn’t some geopolitical game. Lives are at stake. The lies have to stop. Truth and justice have to prevail if there is to be a future for all of us.

“Ukraine may seem a long way from Australia, but what’s happening there is not. Ukraine has become the world which will never be the same because of this militarised barbarism.”

Bishop Mykola Bychok, the leader of the Ukrainian Catholic Church in Australia, said there has been growing fear in his homeland in recent weeks. That fear was realised this week.

“Ukraine is a peaceful nation; we don’t want war. An escalated Russian invasion will result in many more dead and injured, millions of refugees, more tears and pain,” he said.

“This is a question of life and death as nostalgia for an empire lost has led to senseless slaughter and immense suffering throughout Ukraine.”

The Russian invasion of Ukraine, a country whose identity long predates the Soviet Union and which has been widely recognised as a sovereign nation since 1991, is also likely to see the freedom of Ukrainian Catholics to practise their faith curtailed.

This would be all the more bitter for a Church which for 70 years was persecuted and forced underground, Bishop Bychok said.

Archbishop Coleridge stressed that, as with other countries that have known war in recent years, most recently Afghanistan, “a generous response by the Australian government is needed to help people fleeing violence in Ukraine”.

Caritas Australia, part of the Church’s international aid and development agency, is working with Caritas Ukraine to provide vital humanitarian assistance for the victims of war.

Pope Francis has appealed to those “with political responsibility to examine their consciences seriously before God, who is the God of peace and not of war, who is the Father of all, not just of some, who wants us to be brothers and sisters and not enemies”.

The Pope called on all believers and people of good will to make Ash Wednesday, March 2, a special day of prayer and fasting for peace. Archbishop Coleridge urged parishes, schools and other Catholic communities in Australia to heed his call.

“Prayer is more powerful than bombs. So we’ll be praying for an immediate ceasefire and a return to reason and negotiation. We’re also praying for those who have been killed, wounded or forced to flee,” Archbishop Coleridge said.