



Aid to the  
Church in Need

ACN INTERNATIONAL

Interview with Mons. Vivaldas Kulbokas, 09.03.2022 / Ukraine/Kiev /

by Maria Lozano CONTACT: [press@acn-intl.org](mailto:press@acn-intl.org)

## **Nuncio to Ukraine: “This war is not a purely human invention, there is something demonic about it; we can only defeat evil together, with prayer, humility, and love”**

*Interview with Archbishop Visvaldas Kulbokas, Apostolic Nuncio to Ukraine, about the situation in Kiev, the humanitarian crisis, solidarity among the population and the drama of war. The interview was conducted by Maria Lozano, head of press of the international Aid to the Church in Need foundation (ACN).*

### **What is the situation like at the moment in Kiev?**

Since 24 February, every day and every night there have been missile attacks on several points of the city. We at the nunciature are not in a central area, so for now we have not seen any of the bombings from up close. We have witnessed some street fighting quite nearby, not so much these days, but in the previous days. But it is very likely that things will get worse in the coming hours. In other cities like Kharkiv the residential areas have been badly affected... Nowadays nobody in Ukraine can feel safe. What will the next few hours, or the next few days be like? Nobody knows.

Nonetheless, Kiev is relatively calm, in some respects, when compared to other cities: Irpin, which is a suburb of Kiev, or Kharkiv, Chernihiv or Mariupol... Kiev is still connected to the outside world. However, the humanitarian crisis is very severe here, and in some other cities in Ukraine. And then there is something that weighs on us, it is not always possible to help. Sometimes not even agencies like Caritas or the Red Cross, not even Government agencies are able to do anything.

### **Has anything changed in Kiev since the beginning of the war?**

When the war began, we were less organised. I'm not only speaking for myself, but also for these other agencies. Now we are better prepared. It seems that the Russian military is drawing closer to the city, so these past few days the humanitarian organisations have been more active. Caritas, Red Cross, parish organisations – Catholic, but also Orthodox and the Muslims as well – see who is in greater need and distribute food, they try to evacuate those who are in more difficult situations, such as those who don't have electricity or heating.

### **How about supplies? Is there food and water? Are there supply problems everywhere, or only in some places?**

Here at the Nunciature, we stocked up on provisions before the war started, because it was becoming more likely. I personally know of some families that didn't believe it, they were caught by surprise, with provisions for no more than two or three days. Thank God, over the past few days some aid reached Kiev. Furthermore, organisations such as





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Caritas or volunteer groups bring food in from neighbouring cities, since they know that Kiev is exposed to a more severe military attack. This help is always free. There is total solidarity. It is hard to know how each family is doing, or how long they can last out. But for sure, the humanitarian crisis is very severe.

### **Have you been able to get out and move in the streets?**

During this period I have not been out because we are advised against it. However, it is mostly because I don't have time. I am contacted by many people, we get requests and offers of humanitarian aid which at a time like this is very difficult to organise. We have many requests, and no shortage of offers of help, but in places like the centre of Kiev the logistics are very difficult. This means we are forced to be on the phone most of the time, to manage requests and support.

But I can say that people are able to move around in the streets, even though it is dangerous. Mostly it is the volunteers who divide and distribute goods to the most needy. It is difficult to get around, because there are checkpoints every few meters. At 8 pm curfew starts, so nobody goes out for any reason.

### **How would you describe people's spirit and feelings? Are the people who remained in Kiev very frightened?**

Surely. I can't speak for everyone, but I can speak for those I see personally: the priests, volunteers and staff of the Nunciature. People are very concerned, but I can describe the state of mind as "brave". We feel that this is a tragedy we need to face together, we have to help each other and pray very much. I see lots of optimism. Despite the terrible tragedies, I see optimism among many people, especially the priests and religious. Of course, I don't believe we can find that same optimism among the sick, those who need treatment, or women who are giving birth, or have infants.

### **Let's speak about the war. It had been announced for weeks, but nobody really believed it would begin. What was your first reaction on the 24<sup>th</sup>?**

We were very concerned that there might be a war, because the signs were there. But it still causes a huge impact, it is surreal, like living in a film. So, I say to myself, and also to many believers I speak to, that our main weapons, so to speak, are humility, surrendering ourselves totally to God, solidarity, and love. Because in any case if we are here for each other, if we are close to God, if we are faithful, He will look after us. And so it is during this war, which is not a purely human invention, there is something demonic about it – as there is in all violence. And we can only defeat the evil in this war together, all over the world, through fasting, prayer, much humility and love.

### **Would you say there is a religious dimension to this conflict?**

There are plenty of reasons for this war, and some claim that there is a religious



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dimension to some of them. I consider this completely incorrect. If we look at the Ukrainians, for example, we have the Council of Churches and Religious Organisations in Ukraine which has been very united at this time, it is close to the people, and they support each other. This doesn't mean that all difficulties have passed, because clearly some interreligious misunderstandings played a role in the past. But I don't think you can justify this war in this way, because difficulties in interreligious relations have to be dealt with a different way. Surprisingly, I have noticed that the difficulties I saw in Ukraine before have decreased now. It seems that this tragedy is uniting the Ukrainian people. This doesn't mean that this unity will remain afterwards, but it is still a very positive sign.

**Last Sunday, during the Angelus prayer, the Pope announced that two cardinals would be going to Ukraine. Have you felt the support of the Holy Father?**

The words of the Holy Father show that he is doing all he possibly can to end this war. And not only through words, because I know full well that he is seeking all the possible paths for the Church, both spiritual and diplomatic. All that is humanly possible to contribute to peace. Of course, the Pope – and I know this well through his collaborators, with whom I am in touch several times a day – is weighing many possibilities. We are constantly reflecting on what else the Pope can do, either directly or through his collaborators. One of these things is sending the two cardinals. On Tuesday Cardinal Krajewski arrived in Ukraine to bring support and see how he can get humanitarian aid in, and with it the presence of the Pope.

**ACN has launched a 1.3 million euros aid package for the most needy dioceses, especially to support the work being done by priests and religious. How important is this aid?**

Any help is appreciated. It is difficult to guess what the needs will be in the future, but a lot of infrastructure is damaged. Even from a structural and organisational perspective there will be a lot of work to do, because hundreds of schools, hospitals and homes were destroyed. The needs will be enormous. It will take a very long time.

**What would you like to say to those who are asking how they can help the Ukrainians at this time?**

I would like to share a story that I was told just a few hours ago, one of many in Kiev. This person had a vision, in a dream: He was searching for his family in a city that had been destroyed. Jesus came to him, and he asked Jesus for help, but from the cross Jesus replied: "You can't have both. You can't crucify me and ask me for help at the same time. You need to choose: one or the other". When he woke up, after this vision, he told everybody that he had decided to change his life, to live a life with God. This touches me, and it touches everybody. These dramatic moments during the war push us



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to – as we hear from Isaiah – look at God with new eyes, with eyes of trust, of humility  
and conversion.