

Caritas mourns death of social worker killed in missile strike in Kharkiv.

Caritas Australia joins Caritas Ukraine and the global Caritas confederation in mourning the death of Yana Zhernovskaya, a social worker with Caritas Kharkiv, who was killed in a Russian missile strike on 26 July.

Yana died when a missile struck her family's home in Kharkiv. Her 10-year-old son was injured in the attack.

Having been displaced from her hometown of Vovchansk following Russia's full-scale invasion in 2022, Yana rebuilt her life in Kharkiv and dedicated herself to serving others by volunteering for Caritas.

As a social worker, she supported people facing some of the most difficult circumstances imaginable. Despite living through conflict herself, Yana remained committed to helping vulnerable families access care, assistance and hope.

Kirsten Sayers, CEO of Caritas Australia, said: "We are deeply saddened by the loss of Yana Zhernovskaya, who devoted her life to supporting others through the trauma and hardship of war. Our thoughts and prayers are with her family, her colleagues at Caritas Kharkiv and all those grieving this devastating loss."

"Humanitarian workers are not immune from the suffering they seek to alleviate. Yana's death is a tragic reminder of the immense risks faced every day by those serving communities affected by conflict."

Her death comes amid continuing attacks across Ukraine that are exacting a terrible toll on civilians and humanitarian workers.

Earlier this month, Caritas Ukraine reported that intense shelling sparked a major fire near the Caritas Kherson office in the village of Zelenivka. The blaze threatened both the Caritas office and the Nativity of the Blessed Virgin Mary Parish, which were saved through the efforts of staff, parishioners and the local community.

The Kherson region remains one of Ukraine's most dangerous areas, with persistent artillery shelling and drone attacks targeting civilian infrastructure. In recent weeks multiple civilians have been killed and injured in attacks on public transport, vehicles and residential areas.

Earlier this month a major strike in Kyiv also killed and injured civilians and destroyed hundreds of homes and community buildings. Caritas Ukraine responded immediately, providing emergency food assistance and support to affected families.

Caritas Australia stands in solidarity with its colleagues in Ukraine and with all civilians whose lives have been shattered by war.

"Today, we mourn one of our own," Caritas Ukraine said in a statement. "But we want Yana's family to know that they are not alone. We are here for them, in prayer and in action, today and in the days ahead."

To support Caritas Australia's Ukraine Crisis Appeal, visit www.caritas.org.au/ukraine or call 1800 024 413 toll free.

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