
Ukraine: Peace caravan left this morning at dawn

A total of 10 vans, 50 volunteer workers, a dozen tons of humanitarian aid and 2,600 kilometres to cover in the heart of Eastern Europe before reaching, via Budapest, battered Ukraine, with the first destination being Odessa, followed by Mykolaiv. People of Peace mobilised yet again. The third Caravan of Peace organised by the #StopTheWarNow network left this morning at dawn. Participants from throughout Italy met in Gorizia. All formed small groups, each taking a van loaded with humanitarian aid. Participants in this new peace caravan initiative include ACMOS youths, voluntary workers from FOCSIV and the Saint Vincent de Paul society, Caritas Andria and Pax Christi delegates with its president. Msgr. Giovanni Ricchiuti, bishop of Altamura, was among them, participating on behalf of the Italian bishops. The Caravan of Peace is sustained by 175 civil society organisations in Italy. They know they are reaching out to a population suffering from hunger and thirst, who have been living under the threat of rocket attacks for the past six months. But they are also motivated by a willingness to share their anguish and fear. "Unfortunately, after six months of war - says Giampiero Cofano, Secretary General of the Pope John XXIII community, coordinator of the #StopTheWarNow initiative - no sign of peace is on the horizon. Only weapons. No peace talks have been arranged to date. There are no prospects for negotiation in sight. And yet, in the last few days, some positive steps were taken, such as the opening of the ports and Russia's allowing IAEA inspectors into the nuclear power plant.

Our hope is to build on these small signs."

Cofano further explains that this third caravan is a fruit of the relations created by the John XXIII volunteer workers during the months of war with the local population, first in Odessa and now in Mykolaiv. In fact, a district official from the Mykolaiv region invited the #StopTheWarNow volunteers, opening the doors of its shelters and offering them the chance to spend time with the local inhabitants, sharing their life of needs, fear and the dream that the bombs will stop forever. "It took a lot of time and effort," says Cofano, who managed to develop these relations "into friendship."



This morning, before leaving, a goodwill message from Fr Tonio Dall'Olio, president of Pro Civitate Christiana in Assisi, appeared on the participants' chat. "Being near those who are suffering from the daily violence of bombings and missiles, amidst fears and precariousness," reads the message, "is the most effective way to experience that universal fraternity we are all called to realise. Initiatives like those we have been wanting to carry out since the beginning as #StopTheWarNow are neither sensational, nor decisive, nor are they effective according to geo-strategic and political standards, but on humanity's map they are by far the most important. They leave a mark".

M. Chiara Biagioni