

---

## **Ukraine. Msgr. Kulbokas (Nuncio): “Let us not resign ourselves to war. War is nothing but bloodshed”**

Our interviews with the apostolic nuncio in Kyiv, Monsignor **Visvaldas Kulbokas**, always end with the recitation of the Hail Mary prayer for peace: “for the deported children and prisoners who are beaten and tortured for no reason, for the priests held captive, for the wounded, for those who have lost their loved ones. For those who are the victims of a brutal war.” On the morning of 24 February 2022, the Russian army began its invasion of Ukrainian territory. From then on, the country was plunged into a full-blown ordeal. “Every day we witness or learn of the death of entire families,” the nuncio told SIR. “This is a war that affects not only the military but also the civilian population. It is a form of suffering to which we have somehow become accustomed because it has become part of our daily lives, but this does not diminish the fact that it is a tremendous ordeal. That's the difference between those of us who live here and those who don't have the opportunity to be close to the people affected. You can engage in theoretical and conceptual discussions about war from a distance. But only when you are here on the ground do you realise that war is about bloodshed. It oozes blood. People are the first victims. This makes you wonder: how can such a cruel and murderous action, which destroys lives daily, every day, without stopping, still be justified? It is not until you are here that you realise that there can be no justification whatsoever.” **Two years into Russia's full-scale invasion, are the Ukrainian people worn out?** Those who have been forced to emigrate and who unfortunately can't return to their homes, often because they no longer exist, are part of the Ukrainian people. Those who are fighting on the front line, either personally or because they have a family member who is defending their country, are part of the Ukrainian people. Those who have been taken prisoner are also part of the Ukrainian people. Some of them are civilians, some are even doctors, some are soldiers. One wonders why a medical doctor should be treated as a prisoner of war, why a civilian should suffer this fate. I cannot forget the stories of some of the prisoners who returned home through swap deals. They were so traumatised that they struggled to lead normal lives. From the stories I have heard, captivity was hell.

I want to emphasise this: war is hell.

And so I urge everyone to pray to the Lord to help us find a way to stop this atrocity. **When the Russian troops arrived in Kyiv, Pope Francis visited the Russian embassy at the Holy See to ask them to stop. The Holy See's diplomatic efforts were launched immediately, from the very first hours. Two years on from that 24 February, what is your assessment of these diplomatic endeavours?** I know from personal testimonies and also from third parties that Pope Francis himself, not only in words, is personally committed every day to finding pathways to peace. But until now we have seen that those efforts were not enough. And yet, the Church, the Pope, all of us, what instruments do we have? We have the instrument of faith, which is prayer. We have the moral instrument of raising our voices in defence of human life. We have no other instruments, but these instruments are only effective if they are heard, and obviously this message of the Church has not yet been heard. We have no choice but to carry on. There is no room for fatigue, because there is too much bloodshed. Both the Pope himself and the Church as a whole continue and must continue to seek all possible ways to achieve peace. **In the light of the past two years, if you were to address the Ukrainian and Russian leaders, what would you say?** I would tell them that there is no justification for actions that threaten and take the life of a human being. This is true for everyone. If we give priority to the human person, to children, to their mothers and fathers, then there is no scope for aggression, nor for prioritising considerations of a historical or political nature. It's all theoretical rhetoric, divorced from reality. Our appeal today is to see the dripping blood. It's the most conspicuous and telling sign. **What is your message to the heads of the European states and to**

---

**European Union leadership?** Do not resign yourselves to this state of affairs, knowing that when we are united, not only as Europe but as humanity, we are stronger in our aspirations for peace. Although it is not my place to speak about politics or weapons, as a man of the Church I would like to stress the need for greater unity, which allows us to face reality with hope, makes us more courageous and therefore more creative. When humanity is more united, when we recognise ourselves as brothers and decide to focus on the positive things that are there, that's when new ideas are born, initiatives are launched. This can happen even in this time of war. **Two years ago you said that you would not leave Kyiv. Together with the Polish ambassador, you were the only person who did not leave the country in the first days of the war. How has your life changed since then?** It's been two years of uninterrupted spiritual retreat. Although not every day, we often hear missiles and drones flying by, never knowing when or if any of them might fall on our heads. There is a strong awareness that life could stop at any moment. Just a few days ago, the bodies of a mother and her children were discovered in the bathroom of their house. She had taken them there, hoping to protect them from the raging flames. Instead, they all burned to death. So it could be that there is nowhere safe to go. **Do you believe in the hope of peace?** On a human level, I would tend to say no. I don't see enough signs of peace. But our faith tells us that we have a merciful God who, despite the sins of humanity, is capable of forgiving everyone, including the aggressor.

M. Chiara Biagioni