
Ukraine. Msgr. Kryvytskyi (Kiev): "We are facing a tense and unpredictable situation, but dialogue must continue"

"In the event of war my place is here, close to the people, to the Ukrainians." Msgr. **Vitalii Kryvytskyi**, 49, Salesian bishop of Kiev-Zhytomyr for the past 4 years, contacted by phone, speaks in a calm tone but his words are clear: "In case of a Russian invasion, the Church will leave no one behind and will continue to work for peace." The bishop recounts the situation in the context of an online meeting with the Don Bosco Missions to gain an understanding of the Ukrainian population's response to the unfolding developments.



Your Excellency, how would you describe the situation in the country? The situation is extremely tense and unpredictable. Many people don't know exactly what to expect or what to do. The population is striving to understand all the information that is coming in, trying to determine what is true and what is not.

Our task now is also to try to help them to identify the truth of the whole matter.

We are not politicians, but we do want to help people from succumbing to fear and being misled. We are steadfast in hope, anchored to the Lord. **Are people planning to flee?** News reports point towards the need to leave the country. This is obviously true. People have been under a constant pressure to flee war and to migrate towards peace since 2014. Some are seriously considering the option of at least moving to western Ukraine, hoping that, in the event of an invasion, warfare will not extend so far. However, I must say that for now people are not panicking and there is no urge to flee the cities. **What is the nature of your relations with the governing authorities?** We cooperate and work together for peace. There is a constructive dialogue with civil authorities. We have met with the head of parliament last week, while a meeting between the Pan-Ukrainian Council of Churches and the foreign and defence ministers is scheduled to take place in a couple of days.

The government is asking us to facilitate the dialogue with the people.

In the event of war, have you made any specific plans of action? Clearly, the defence of the country is a matter for our national institutions. Our only plan of action is to remain close to the people. We will respond to any scenario that may arise. But war is not the solution, which is why we believe that the path of political dialogue must continue being pursued. **In your opinion, why is this happening? Why does Russia want to regain control over Ukraine?** I don't see any reason for Russia to want to occupy our country. The reasons that might be invoked are just provocations. Some explain it with Russia's imperialistic ambitions, but those are just words. **How do Ukrainians feel about their Russian neighbours?** To begin with, it should be said that many people born in Ukraine are now living in Russia. The intermingling of peoples is a phenomenon that characterised the Soviet period, but it continued also after that time. It is only normal and obvious that people in Ukraine have relatives and friends in Russia. Some human bonds cannot be concealed. Admittedly, things may have changed since 2013. **How?** Many Ukrainians are likely to have prioritised family relations with their Russian relatives, thereby giving greater importance to them than to political

problems. However, there are also families that have fallen out over the conflict and its inherent political tensions. In other words, *some people continue to maintain close relations and share their thoughts and feelings with Russian relatives and friends. On the other hand, because of the conflict, others have chosen to take sides.* While it's hard for me to speak from Russia's perspective, I can say that in Ukraine many people distinguish between a Russian citizen and the positions Moscow has taken with regard to Kiev. **Msgr. Kryvytskyi, what will you do in the event of a Russian invasion?** I will stay here with my people without question. There is no other option.

Andrea Zaghi