

Report of Imam Sheik Ibrahim Mogra, who represented RfPUK on a trip organised by Europe, a Patient Association on 23rd -25th May 2022

In March, Mayor Vitali Klitschko of Kyiv, Ukraine's besieged capital, issued a call to the religious leaders to come to Kyiv: "I make an appeal to the world's spiritual leaders to take a stand and assume the moral function that is incumbent upon them, and to proudly assume the responsibility of their religions for peace," said Klitschko. " ... Come to Kyiv to show their solidarity with the Ukrainian people. To show their compassion, and to join together in a spirit of harmony that my country and the whole world needs. Let us make Kyiv the capital of humanity, spirituality, and peace."

This week, religious leaders and believers from around the world answered Klitschko's plea. Seventeen leaders and people of faith from the major world religions spent two full days in Kyiv to engage in prayer, pastoral accompaniment, and distribution of humanitarian aid, as well as having key encounters with peacebuilders, religious leaders, and political leaders.

Day 1: On the first day, the delegation met with papal nuncio Archbishop Visvaldas Kulbokas, the Vatican ambassador to Ukraine. Following at 9 am the delegation held a prayer service for peace at Babyn Yar Holocaust Memorial Center, host partner of the delegation's visit to Kyiv, a non-governmental organization that formed the first modern Holocaust museum in Eastern Europe and is the center for tragedy study. The delegation was greeted by Mr. Maksym Rabinovych, CEO of the Babyn Yar Holocaust Memorial Center, a site bombed in early March by Russian military. Rabbi Dawid Szychowski, rabbi of Lodz (representing the Chief Rabbi of Poland, Michael Schudrich) led prayers with Lord Maurice Glasman and Dr. Barbara Wien, followed by Rt. Rev. Dr. Jo Bailey Wells, Anglican bishop of Dorking, U.K., with Sr. Sheila Kinsey, FCJM, and Ms. Michele Dunne, OFS, the service concluded with prayers with Imam Pallavicini and Imam Ibrahim Mogra. The papal nuncio led The Lord's Prayer in Ukrainian as part of the service. Following the prayers, the delegation met with Mr. Center of the Association of Muslims of Ukraine. From there, they went to Irpin to meet with Oleskii Dniprov, from President Zelensky's office and Mrs. Olena Bogdan, head of the office of religious and ethnic affairs. In the afternoon, the delegation met with members of the Islamic centre and Muslim Association of Ukraine. Followed by a trip to Irpin where they met Fr. Vitaliy and Fr. Myroslav at the Greek Orthodox Church of the Nativity of Mary, who spoke of the experience of their community living in the basement for two weeks while the region was held by Russian military. A shell damaged a section of the priests' house and shelling damaged the walls and windows, however the new iconostasis was unharmed. At the Caritas facility in Irpin the delegation delivered a package with medicine, toiletries, feminine hygiene products, blankets, undergarments, and chocolate and assisted in unloading a delivery of supplies from the border areas, while speaking with the community of elderly who have taken refuge in the Caritas center. The delegation was pleased to share their meals at Taki Da Restaurant in Kyiv that served kosher and halal meals for the interreligious group.

Day 2: The delegation was welcomed on Wednesday morning at the mayoral offices of Mayor Klitschko by Mr. Valentyn Mondryivskyi, chief officer of humanitarian affairs for the Mayor's office and Rabbi Jonathan Markovitz, chief rabbi of Kyiv. Both thanked the delegation for their presence, shared their recent experiences under Russia's military invasion, and laid out their current needs from the wider world, and particularly from religious communities. From the mayor's office, the delegation traveled to the Ukrainian Catholic Church of the Resurrection where they met Metropolitan Schevchuk, major archbishop of Kyiv and head of Ukrainian Catholic Church and Fr. Ihor Shaban, director of the Ecumenical Council of Interreligious Affairs, who described how his

local community survived the occupation of Russian troops and how many people came from the surrounding areas to take shelter in their church compound. He also expressed some new difficulties that emerged between some of the Orthodox churches and how now “the very essence of the Christian message is at stake”. Next the delegation traveled to St. Sophia’s Cathedral complex where they led a prayer service in front of St. Sophia’s Cathedral that included prayers and reflections on the God’s demand to stop aggression and to seek peace and pursue it. At the conclusion of the prayer service for peace, Ms. Nella Kukovalska, director general of the Cathedral of St. Sofia led a tour of the complex for part of the delegation. Other delegates were guests of Sheikh Akhmed Tamim, Grand Mufti of Ukraine at the mosque of Mercy (al-Rahma) where they joined a wedding reception celebrated by the community, which had been postponed due to the war and the lack of food. Part of the mosque (namely where the holy Quran is usually taught) is now dedicated to host refugees during day and night. In the late afternoon, delegates met at the Central House of Artists to meet with members of DobraDia, founded by Lydiia Shevchenko with a purpose of using arts to build resilience, humanitarian aid, assistance to school children and elderly. DobraDia is currently working with the UN World Food program to distribute food to 100,000 people each month. A panel of civil society peacebuilders discussed how their work has changed during the war. Dr. Tatyana Bilyk, supervisor at Mediation School and League of that addresses conflict mediation in families and trauma counseling, particularly now with widow. Andre Kaminchikov, director of Global Partnership for Prevention of Armed Conflict--Eastern Europe and a strategist developing effective anti-war messages in Russia. Bishop Theodosius, Ukrainian Orthodox Church (Moscow Patriarchate) from a monastery in the Diocese of Nizhyn (Chernihiv Oblast), also on the panel, described the Christian mission for peace and explained that his local community does “not agree with the policies and actions of Russia.” Ms. Olena Suslova, founder of the Empowering Education peacebuilding program used in 10 countries and president of the Women’s Information Consultative Center. At dinner the delegation was joined by Rabbi Moshe Reuven Azman, chief rabbi of the Brodsky synagogue in Kyiv as well as Rabbi Markovitz and his wife Mrs. Inna Markovitz who now runs Care For Kiev (careforkiev.com), a humanitarian aid foundation.

The organisers of this first international interreligious delegation for peace to Kyiv stated the purpose of the trip. “We are here to demand that bombing of Ukrainian cities must stop,” said Dr. Mateusz Piotrowski, one of the lead organizers and president of Europe, a Patient, “We want to contribute to strengthening humanitarian corridors. We also hope that interventions of religious leaders, in the form of recurrent vigils for just peace in other cities endangered by bombing, could provide an important instrument of peacebuilding – in Ukraine and elsewhere. ”