

*“He will judge between the nations and will settle disputes for many peoples. They will beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks. Nation will not take up sword against nation, nor will they train for war anymore.”*

*(Isaiah 2:4)*

Dear Bishop Eduard Khegay,

We are saddened and shocked by what is happening in Europe between Russia and Ukraine.

God calls peoples and nations to peace and love, and the message of the Gospel points to the path of reconciliation and never to war and violence, as a solution to conflicts.

European governments have tried the path of diplomacy and dialogue to prevent the sound of weapons and bombs from echoing across our continent, causing the tragic memories of past wars to re-emerge in everyone. Unfortunately, this was not the case.

The Russian government has decided to invade Ukraine, a democratic and sovereign nation, and now two neighbouring peoples are in danger of becoming enemies only. This is not what we wanted to see in 2022. War is always evil and always entails considerable costs.

The Methodist churches in Italy are very concerned about our sister churches in Ukraine and Russia, they are concerned about the suffering and deaths that once again the two peoples will have to endure because of the ferocity, political and economic calculation of a wicked government like the Russian one.

We know that, like the members of the Ukrainian and Russian Methodist Churches, there are many men and women in these two countries who only want peace, and we pray with you and with them that the reasons for dialogue will prevail and that we will return to peace, a just and real peace.

We pray for pastors, leaders and congregations in the United Methodist Church in Ukraine and Russia; may God grant that their witness of reconciliation and peace will bring strength and hope to the Ukrainian people.

We pray for you, bishop of both Russia and Ukraine, and for the District Superintendent of the UMC in Ukraine, may God give you the wisdom, patience and love that you need in your ministry and leadership under these challenging circumstances.

The Italian Methodist National Board (CP OPCEMI) call on all our congregations to pray and to joint to the vigils for peace on Ash Wednesday, 2 March, together with Protestant churches around the world. If circumstances require it, our churches will do

their utmost to welcome and support the refugees who will inevitably flee Ukraine because of the war. But we still hope that the weapons will stop and that we can return to dialogue.

May God protect us all from the escalation and spreading of war, and may we follow Him on His path of truth and peace by heeding His call that one nation no longer raises its sword against another and that we no longer learn war, but - as theologian Dietrich Bonhoeffer put it - continue to 'dare peace by faith'.

With fraternally greetings

Rev. Mirella Manocchio

President of the OPCEMI

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