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Address

**by Grand Archbishop Sviatoslav Shevchuk (Kiev/Kyiv),
Head of the Ukrainian Greek-Catholic Church,
Grand Archbishop of Kiev-Halyc,
at the St Michael's Annual Reception
on 10 September 2024 in Berlin**

Ukraine and Our Common Hope

Esteemed Herr Bundeskanzler,
Ministers of the government,
members of the Deutsche Bundestag,
dear Bishop Bätzing,
dear Prelate Jüsten,
your Eminencies and Excellencies,
dear brothers and sisters!

First of all, thank you, Bishop Bätzing and Prelate Jüsten, for your invitation to speak at the St. Michael's Reception this year. Your gracious hospitality is yet another sign of your big-hearted solidarity with the wounded but unbroken Ukrainian nation.

Esteemed Chancellor Scholz, Members of the Cabinet, Minister Schulze and Faeser, and Members of the German Bundestag, I thank you: You help the Ukrainian Army defend the innocent. You stand against tyranny and international aggression. You support a truly just peace. You work tirelessly for European unity and international justice. I am very grateful for your commitment as is the Ukrainian people.

And to you all, gathered here tonight at the St. Michael's Annual Reception: Your country has warmly received well over one million forcibly displaced Ukrainians. For the nobleness of Germans and the decency of the European Union, for the hope that you share with us, I express to you the profound gratitude of all Ukrainians.

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The Church as Sign and Herald of Hope

We are approaching the thousandth day of the full-scale Russian war against Ukraine. 1000 days of air raid sirens throughout the country. 1000 days of carnage, terror, and death.

Tonight, I address you as a representative of a Church, as a pastor of people entrusted to my care. At the same time, I stand before you as a member of a nation that experiences an excruciating war unseen in Europe since World War II. But I am not here to complain and carp. My desire is to bring hope and share with you the source of our strength and resilience.

We have a job to complete together. The genocides of Hitler and Stalin must not be repeated. For centuries, our Church has accompanied her people in joys and sorrows. Our bishops, priests, and religious continue bear witness. Despite deathly danger, they remain with the people to the end, also in the occupied territories. They are imprisoned, tortured, and humiliated.

My own life is marked by the way of the cross of our land. I was elected head of the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church in 2011. Eleven of the fourteen years my ministry has been under the cloud of war. In Kyiv and throughout the country, from the beginning of the full-scale invasion, I accompany and address our faithful and all Ukrainians daily with words of encouragement and hope. As a pastor I share the pain of the families of the hundreds of thousands who have been killed and injured, the millions who have been forced from their homes and their land and have lost everything.

When I asked the Mayor of Kyiv, former world boxing champion Vitali Klitschko, how best to serve the citizens of the capital in these difficult times, he said: “More than bread and clothes we need from the Church a word of hope. Be a sign and herald of hope!”

But how can we find and deliver hope in such dark times of terror and death? The answer is clear: The Church's strength lies in her unshakable belief in the promise of God that he “gives justice to those denied it, gives food to the hungry, gives liberty to prisoners, (...) protects the stranger, he keeps the orphan and widow” (Ps 146, 7,9). God is always on the side of the innocent victim. So, he is with us and he stands with us. We believe that, in the end, despite all trials and tribulations, good will triumph over evil, truth will prevail over lies. Therefore—we stand, we struggle, we pray. And we know that you stand with us.

The Church Shares the Fate of the Nation

Ten years have passed since the initial act of aggression with the annexation of Crimea and Russia's war in Donbas. The current phase of the war has turned into a marathon in which Ukrainians must constantly run at sprint speed so as not to be defeated in a deadly race. I ask you to run with us – fast, firm, and fearless.

There can be no doubt about the utter ruthlessness and wickedness of Russia's geopolitical, genocidal intentions and neo-imperial plan. The massacres of Bucha, Irpin, Borodianka, and Iziium, the bombing of the maternity ward and the drama theater in the city of Mary, Mariupol, July's missile strike at the Okhmatdyt children's hospital in Kyiv are all crushing reminders. Our people know that Russian occupation brings the mass abduction of our children, the rape of our women, the forcible conscription of our men to a Russian army that kills their own brothers and sisters, and the imposition of a Russian-fascist or "Rashist" (Ruscist/Russist) identity upon our youth.

Some 1.4 million homes, affecting 3.4 million people, have been destroyed. 25,400 kilometers of roads and 344 bridges were damaged. The Zaporizhzhia Nuclear Power Station remains under occupation and constant threat. Russia's invasion forced 13 million people from their homes. Eight million fled to the European Union and five million remain internally displaced. Russia intends to further depopulate our country by a broader, in fact total, occupation that would send at least ten more million to the EU. 630 churches and religious facilities have been destroyed or damaged.

If Putin succeeds in occupying the whole of Ukraine, all Ukrainian churches will be obliterated. Our Church has already been banned in the occupied parts of Ukraine. Almost all our parishes have been destroyed, churches and monasteries have been confiscated, and property has been looted. But as in other previous attempts in history to annihilate us, our religion, our culture, we live and we bear witness. Two Ukrainian Greek Catholic priests, Redemptorist fathers, Bohdan Heleta and Ivan Levytsky, have recently returned from Russian captivity after over 1.5 years of imprisonment, torture, and humiliation. Our solidarity and resilience come at a cost, as does yours. But I implore you not only to continue but to enhance your support for Ukrainians in their struggle for freedom and dignity. There is no other way.

Putin has expressed his genocidal intentions unambiguously and will stop at nothing – until he is stopped. He mercilessly brutalizes populations to achieve his geopolitical goals. He thought nothing of occupying part of Georgia, razing Grozny and Aleppo, he sends assassins to foreign countries like Germany and Wagner mercenaries to terrorize African peoples, forces millions of Syrians into exile while deliberately inciting chaos and division in societies that still honor their humanitarian obligations and give shelter to refugees. In each of these contexts Russian soldiers committed war crimes and crimes against humanity – for which he demonstratively rewarded them with high military honors.

How can Putin be stopped? It is the grace of God, along with our moral clarity, unity in courage, and decisive action, that can and will force Putin to abandon his declared plans to destroy my people, country, and Church, that will thwart his attempts to obliterate an international order based on law and human rights and give us the strength to uphold them.

Ukrainians want peace

No one wants peace more than Ukrainians. After our liberation from the red empire of evil we moved to join the democracies of Europe and the world for whom the virtues of freedom, justice, respect of the rights and dignity of persons and nations are fundamental. We contributed in a singular, visionary manner to building global peace and freedom.

As Pope Francis noted, so many forget that thirty years ago, three years after independence, in December 1994, Ukraine disarmed its huge nuclear arsenal on its own free will. In exchange Ukraine was given assurances by the signatories of the nuclear disarmament agreement that they would defend Ukraine's sovereignty and independence. Instead, one of the partners of this agreement invaded Ukraine. Ukraine has the moral right to expect that the other guarantors, together with the entire democratic world, will help protect our sovereignty and reestablish our territorial integrity.

Ukraine experienced peaceful revolutions in 1990, 2004, and 2014 and demonstrated its profound commitment to human rights, democracy, and freedom. We were able to assure freedom of the press and public expression, religious freedom and the peaceful coexistence and fraternal collaboration between the Churches and religious organizations. The most recent decisions taken by the Ukrainian Parliament in the sphere are aimed at preventing the weaponization of religion and spiritual aggression against our freedom. Our country conducted peaceful power transitions from one president to another until Russia disrupted our democratic cycle by trying to impose its autocratic ways.

Today, the free world recognizes Ukrainians for holding sacred democratic principles even during a time of martial law, which understandably leads to the concentration and centralization of power. Ukrainians crave and long for peace as no one else. We want peace with all our hearts, all our souls – but a just peace, because only a just peace will be authentic and sustainable.

Overcoming fear and illusion

In their appeal "*Friede diesem Haus*" (Peace to this House), the German Catholic bishops warn: "If the Kremlin manages to achieve its war aims, there is concern that it will continue its revisionist policy of restoring the Russian Empire by military means." Russia trades in fear and dread. It threatens Western populations with direct military conflict with NATO. It intimidates with scenarios of a World War III and nuclear attack. It fuels anxiety and panic in the West. Fear often begets illusory hopes and schemes for a quick, low-cost, corner-cutting peace. Such mirages are dangerous for several reasons.

First, there may be a temptation to equate a facile ceasefire with peace. A peace naively imagined and heedlessly enacted will turn out to be a short-lived truce, after which the rewarded aggressor will return rearmed, stronger, and more voracious than before. The consumption of Ukraine is just the beginning. The Baltic, Caucasus, and Central Asian nations have no illusions

that they would be the next target. Neither should anyone. The words of the Apostle Paul should be a warning: “While people are saying, “Peace and security,” then sudden disaster comes upon them...” (*1 Thess 5:3*).

Second, neither the world's democracies nor the Church should endorse a peace that accepts aggression as a successful method of appropriating another nation's sovereign territory. Based on his experience of two world wars, the legendary Head of our Church (1901-1944), Metropolitan Andrey Sheptytsky, wrote: “Everyone understands that a peace that would not take into account the needs of peoples and in which peoples would consider themselves offended and would in fact be offended would not be any peace, but rather the cause of new and worse complications and mutual hatreds that would necessarily lead to new wars”. We know from our common European history that unpunished and unrepented evil will find a different incarnation and come back in the future, more wicked, dangerous, and destructive.

Third, a peace agreement makes sense when there is confidence that all its signatories will honor their commitments. Treaties presuppose trust – at least some. But Russia has violated each and every security agreement it had concluded with Ukraine. So on what basis can we assume that Russia will keep its word? After all, it openly denies Ukraine's legal status as a state, its very right to exist. Thus, it is politically mistaken and strategically imprudent to believe that the logic that guides democratic nations and peoples applies to or sways totalitarians and dictators.

War in Ukraine as a Test of Our Humanity

Respect for human dignity and human life is at the core of Catholic Social Teaching and of democracy. Today, Ukrainian soldiers, medics, volunteers, and chaplains bear witness to human dignity by risking their lives to save others and allow them to dream and work toward a future of freedom and dignity. I am confident Ukrainians will preserve these experiences and transfer and translate it into social structures and institutions in post-war Ukraine.

Of course, our rule of the law is still imperfect and we battle corruption. But Ukraine is learning the lessons of democracy in extreme circumstances, while authoritarian and nihilistic reflexes reemerge in Europe and more people become skeptical about democracy and its merits. Ukraine's valiant struggle challenges the view that physical safety and material comfort are the only goals of democracy. It teaches us that democracy deserves to be defended at the cost of one's comfort, health, and even life. Thus, we can be of help to each other in advocating and promoting democracy for the right reasons and for the right purpose. But first Ukraine must win peace.

I ask you to help people in Germany and other Western countries see through propaganda and overcome fears, illusions, and disappointments. I ask you to explain to them that this war is a war on which the future of democracy depends, it is a war not only against Ukraine, but against

Germany, all of Europe, and the entire democratic order. Ukraine needs your support not only for its own sake but for yours.

We live in tumultuous, challenging times. Times of tough decisions, times of sacrifice. But I would like to speak not only of “time” but of our Kairos. We have an opportunity, here and now, when the Lord sends his Spirit to overcome the forces of evil that today assault the human person and human society. We believe that God’s Spirit, the spirit of truth, the spirit of freedom, the spirit of love, is stronger than the power of the Adversary. As Church we stand with the Ukrainian people and all people of good will in Europe and the World and we share the hope that arises from our faith. To share hope is to multiply it.

With our common hope we will bring about what Isaiah prophesied: “As the earth grows its plants and as the garden grows its seeds, so will the Lord God grow justice and glory before all the nations” (*Isaiah* 61:11). To this end we stand, we struggle, we pray – together.