

# **Patriarch Kirill sidesteps bombing of children's hospital, and praises Putin**

*Jonathan Luxmoore, Church Times, 12<sup>th</sup> July 2024*

PATRIARCH Kirill of Moscow has lauded President Putin as a divine instrument for saving mankind, ignoring global condemnation of Russian missile attacks on a children's hospital and other civilian targets in Ukraine.

"A restraining force is one capable of preventing the onset of total evil — an evil aimed at subjugating and destroying the human race," the Patriarch said in Tikhvin on Tuesday.

"Our common task is thus to pray for and support our President, Vladimir Vladimirovich Putin. At this difficult time, the Lord has sent a man capable not only of sustaining blows, but also of mobilising our country to resist this total evil."

The praise was given as efforts continued to recover dozens of Ukrainian civilians killed and injured in Monday's missile and guided-bomb strikes, which partially wrecked the Okhmatdyt Paediatric Hospital, Ukraine's largest, as well as a maternity facility nearby.

A Vatican communiqué said that the Pope had expressed "deep shock at the escalation of violence", while his Nuncio in Kyiv, Archbishop Visvaldas Kulbokas, said that he had watched a video of the cruise missile striking the hospital's dialysis unit, and was at a loss how people of conscience could justify attacks on "the weakest of the weakest".

The general secretary of the World Council of Churches (WCC), the Revd Professor Jerry Pillay, also denounced Moscow's "disregard for international humanitarian law", and said that those targeting civilians violated "the most fundamental principles of law, ethics, morals, and religion".

President Zelensky requested an emergency meeting of the UN Security Council in response to the continuing attacks, which left at least 42 dead and 140 injured as Western leaders reaffirmed support for Ukraine at a NATO summit in Washington.

In a statement on Monday, the All-Ukrainian Council of Churches and Religious Organisations, grouping Orthodox, Catholic, and Protestant leaders, as well as Jews and Muslims, condemned Moscow's "act of extreme cruelty and disregard for human life and God", and urged governments worldwide to "avoid complicity in Russia's war crimes" and provide Ukraine "with the necessary means to protect lives".

The Primate of the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church, Major Archbishop Sviatoslav Shevchuk, said that the killing of children receiving kidney surgery and other lifesaving treatment was a "crime against humanity" and "sin crying out to heaven for vengeance".

The Primate of the independent Orthodox Church of Ukraine (OCU), Metropolitan Epiphany (Dumenko), warned in a post on social media that those "who can provide protection but do not" were complicit in "crimes witnessed by the whole world".

International agencies, including the World Health Organization, say that hundreds of other hospitals and medical facilities have been attacked since Russia's invasion in February 2022, placing doctors and patients at high risk.

In a statement this week, Christian Aid said that it had been "working flat out" to help to provide "emergency medical and other essential assistance", and that it was "heartbreaking" to see such "small gains" ruined by Russia's "heartless attacks on civilian energy and medical facilities".

In a weekend message to Masoud Pezeshkian, the newly elected President of Iran, which is supplying Moscow with drones and rockets, Patriarch Kirill said that Russians and Iranians were "united by a desire to preserve their historical spiritual and cultural traditions, and a commitment to enduring moral principles". He counted on "continued good co-operation" with Islamic leaders in Iran, he said.