



January 26, 2022

Your Holiness, Pope Francis:

The prospect of war between Russia and NATO allies, including the United States, over the current military buildup on the border of Ukraine increases by the hour. As the global Catholic peace movement, Pax Christi International is deeply grateful for your call for a nonviolent resolution to this accelerating conflict and for the many ways the Holy See is mobilizing spiritual resources and diplomatic good offices to avert the possibility of hostilities. Violent conflict would surely result in immense suffering for the people of Ukraine and potentially catastrophic consequences for the world. Today our global movement is participating in the Day of Prayer for Peace in Ukraine.

We are aware of all that you have done to build peace and to sustain it, from visiting war zones around the world and working tirelessly for nuclear disarmament, to kissing the shoes of South Sudanese leaders to encourage peace and fellowship among them. We are thankful that this powerful spirit of peacemaking is being exercised in response to the growing crisis in Ukraine and for every concrete step the Holy See can take to help the parties pull back from the brink of war and set forth on a new path to peace.

To prevent war at this eleventh hour would be a miracle – but such a miracle is possible.

Sixty years ago, the Cuban Missile Crisis brought the world to the precipice of nuclear war. As the harrowing conflict escalated, the possibility of both countries launching mutually devastating nuclear strikes against each other seemed increasingly likely. Yet, In the midst of this unparalleled crisis, Saint Pope John XXIII intervened.

Using emissaries, he privately communicated to both sides proposals for resolving the crisis that would meet their concerns. Then, publicly he issued his plea for “moral responsibility by world leaders in the handling of the Cuban Missile Crisis,” a message that was delivered to the two nations’ embassies and broadcast around the world, with a ringing call for both sides to talk: “Promoting, favouring, accepting conversations, at all levels and at any time, is a maxim of wisdom and prudence which attracts the blessings of heaven and earth.” Three days later, Soviet leader Nikita Khrushchev agreed to remove the missiles in Cuba in exchange for President John Kennedy’s pledge not to invade that country. Years later Khrushchev said of the pope’s intervention, “This message was the only gleam of hope.”

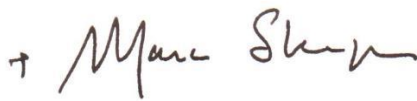
There are many parallels between the crisis in Ukraine and the Cuban Missile Crisis. Similar to the previous geopolitical conflict, the current brinkmanship could spin tragically out of control and at the moment does not seem to offer a route to a peaceful settlement. But in 1962 Saint Pope John XXIII opened a way where there was none. He brought his spiritual commitment to peace, his constructive proposals, and, most importantly, his openness to

each party and their needs. With these three gifts, he created the space for dialogue and mutual trust that were critical to resolving a dangerous struggle.

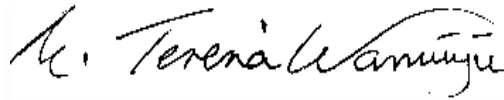
Another miracle is possible. We pray that you, Holy Father, might help to open the way for the Russian leader and the second U.S. Catholic president to dialogue and even to build trust, echoing the way Saint Pope John XXIII brought the Soviet leader and the first U.S. Catholic president together to do so.

In union with you, we join in prayer for a nonviolent resolution to this crisis and for just peace in Ukraine.

On behalf of Pax Christi International,



Bishop Marc Stenger  
Bishop of Troyes, France  
Co-President Pax Christi International



Sr Teresia Wamuyu Wachira (IBVM)  
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Co-President of Pax Christi International



Greet VANAERSCHOT  
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