

STATEMENT

by the Estonian Council of Churches and the leaders of its member churches regarding the hostilities in Ukraine and the reception of war refugees in Estonia

Since 24 February 2022, the world is no longer the same. We are witnessing terrible developments on the battlegrounds in Ukraine. Thousands of people have died, including innocent children, teens, the elderly. Tens of thousands have been wounded. Hundreds of thousands have been left homeless or are suffering from fear, cold, hunger, thirst and ill health in desperate circumstances. Millions have been forced to flee from home or homeland. The battles claim the lives both of men defending their country and of those that have become underlings of evil. The warfare has ruined picturesque cities and wreaked havoc in fields just ahead of the spring sowing season.

The UN General Assembly has condemned Russia's war on Ukraine. As representatives of the member churches of the Estonian Council of Churches, we agree with this judgement. The High Commissioner of the UN Human Rights Council has warned that indiscriminate bombings of hospitals, kindergartens, schools and other public buildings and residential areas violate international law and may qualify as war crimes. A number of investigations have been launched. As leaders of Estonia's largest churches, we condemn the shelling of civilian sites, including churches, and the endangering of civilian lives.

The Tretyakov Gallery in Moscow includes Alexander Ivanov's masterpiece "The Appearance of the Christ to the People". The painting depicts the Lord Jesus Christ, Saviour of the whole world, appearing to a crowd. John the Baptist is pointing to Him, proclaiming, "*Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!*" (John 1:29) Receiving His salvation, however, requires repentance from the commoners and the rulers alike. As leaders of various churches in Estonia, we call for an end to hostilities and a return to Christ's commandment to love one another, for asking forgiveness for the atrocities committed and for redressing whatever is possible.

In the said painting, John the Baptist is asked by the repentant crowd: "*What should we do then?*" He answers them: "*Anyone who has two shirts should share with the one who has none, and anyone who has food should do the same.*" (Luke 3:10-11) This serves as guidelines to us as thousands of war refugees have reached Estonia. It is our Christian duty to be by their side and share with them what they need.

As we are reliving our own nation's painful past, we are witnessing the love that has compelled many to lend a helping hand. An ecclesiastical network connecting churches and congregations all across Estonia, we want to do our best in offering practical help, food and accommodation to everyone in need thereof, regardless of religion. This includes pastoral care and fellowship. Many of the Ukrainian people coming here belong to our sister and member churches.

Dear Estonian people! We have rejoiced in the bloodless restoration of our national independence. We acknowledge that this is a great grace of God. In the light of everything that is happening in Ukraine, we too need to repent and turn our hearts to God. Even if we do not understand how God works, we entrust our lives and our land to Him in prayer, just as our grandmothers and grandfathers did in the most critical times.

We commemorate the victims of the war and continue to pray for peace to come to Ukraine.

President of the Estonian Council of Churches, Archbishop emeritus of the Estonian Evangelical Lutheran Church **Andres Põder**

Archbishop of the Estonian Evangelical Lutheran Church **Urmas Viilma**

Metropolitan of the Orthodox Church of Estonia **Stephanus**

Metropolitan of the Estonian Orthodox Church of the Moscow Patriarchate **Eugene**

Roman Catholic Church Apostolic Administrator of Estonia, bishop **Philippe Jourdan**

Bishop of the Armenian Apostolic Church in the Baltic countries **Vardan Navasardyan**

Bishop of the Estonian Christian Pentecostal Church **Alur Õunpuu**

President of the Union of Free Evangelical and Baptist Churches of Estonia, pastor **Erki Tamm**

President of the Estonian Conference of Seventh-Day Adventist Churches, pastor **Andres Ploompuu**

Superintendent of the Estonian Methodist Church, pastor **Robert Cherenkov**

Priest of the Charismatic Episcopal Church of Estonia **Thomas Eriste**

Tallinn, 17 March AD 2022